



# Re-reading of Classical Tamil Literary Works

## Chronicles of Ancient Tamils' Life

N. Murugesapandian

Translated by  
Govindaswamy Rajagopal



Discovery Publications

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**DISCOVERY PUBLICATIONS**

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**Re-reading of Classical Tamil Literary Works  
Chronicles of Ancient Tamils' Life**

English Translation by  
**Govindaswamy Rajagopal©**

of Tamil book comprising thirteen essays by  
**N. Murugesapandian**

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Dedicated to the memory of  
my elder brother  
**Govindaswamy Krishnamoorthy,**  
a noble soul and my bedrock after my beloved father.



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முனைவர்.ந.அருள்

இயக்குநர் (மொழிபெயர்ப்பு)

தமிழ் வளர்ச்சி மற்றும் செய்தித் துறை,  
தலைமைச் செயலகம், புனித ஜார்ஜ் கோட்டை,  
சென்னை - 600 009.



**Dr.N.Arul**

Director (Translation)

Tamil Development and Information Department  
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## Foreword

I am delighted to write this foreword for this translation work entitled *Re-reading of Classical Tamil Literary Works: Chronicles of Ancient Tamils' Life* by Prof. Govindaswamy Rajagopal, not only because he is my friend but also an erudite Tamil Professor from my *alma mater* i.e. the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi, who has authored several research books and articles in Tamil and English and has befittingly been recently awarded *Tamilttattā U.Vē.Sā. Virudu* by Sanga Ilakkiya Ayyu Naduvam, Perambalur, Tamil Nadu.

No man is an island; neither is the culture a man is born into. In the same way, no language can grow in isolation; to survive, a language must constantly reinvent itself over time, which necessarily involves transactions with other languages, near and far. Throughout history, and especially in the contemporary age, translation has been a pivotal mode of a transaction between languages, and thereby between communities and cultures.

A language is more than just a means of communication. It is a repository of a community, collective history and heritage. The Tamil language has grown in status, asserting its age-old history and expanding its horizons, and how? It has done this with the help of translations, both from and into that language, and this translation

in English done by Prof. G. Rajagopal is a stupendous attempt to establish the fascinating chronicles on the life of ancient Tamil people. Though, it is rare to find Tamil teachers engaged in translation projects from Tamil to English nowadays, the aforementioned Tamil teacher from the University of Delhi has brilliantly transcreated the recent Tamil research work in his maiden attempt titled *Maruvācippil Cevviyal Ilakkiyap Paḍaippugaḷ: Paḷantamiḷar Vāḷviyal Padivugaḷ*, penned by a well-known Tamil scholar, Dr. N. Murugesapandian.

The breathtaking poems in “Love Stands Alone” speak to us across time, space, language and culture. The *Akam* (interior) and *Puṛam* (exterior), form their two overarching themes. While *Akam* poems are concerned with love across varied situations: Clandestine and Illicit love, Conjugal bliss and Stressful infidelity, Separation and Union, *Puṛam* poems on the other hand encompass all other aspects of worldly life: Wars and Battlefields, the Munificence of kings and chieftains and the Wisdom of bards, etc.

Out of 13 chapters, the book in 6 chapters, clearly elucidates the Sangam woman poets’ personal relationship with the chieftains/kings, their sexual feelings and heroic sentiments. The translator not only have brought out the patrilineal society structure but also ably highlighted differential linguistic framework and interpreted lacking feminine terms for masculine words of deep-rooted gender bias essayed in the Sangam poetry. In the last two chapters, Dr. Rajagopal very captivantly has transcreated the lives of extraordinary characters namely Mādhavi and Maṇimēkalai, pictured respectively in *Silappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*. The remaining five chapters have fascinatingly brought out the facts and figures of the ancient Tamils’ faith/religious sentiments, rituals chronicled in the text *Pattuppāṭṭu*, thought-provoking discourses on the Eighteen Tamil Didactic Works, especially the world-fame *Tirukkuraḷ*, *Nāḷaḍiyār*, *Paḷamoli Nāṇūru*, etc. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that all the chapters of this book are beautifully

translated, and have perfectly deciphered the life and glory of the ancient Tamils.

Prof. Rajagopal has extensively relied on the fine translations, wherever necessary, from the repositories of A.K. Ramanujan, Vaidehi Herbert, V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, Kausalya Hart, G.U. Pope, Rev. W.H. Drew, Satguru Sivaya Subramaniaswami, and A. Jahir Husain. In his endeavor, he himself has translated all the phrases and terms essayed in the Sangam corpus dexterously for everyone's delight. For example, “*yādum ūrē yāvarum kēḷir*” (*Puranānūru* 192), the world-famous stanza of the poem composed by Pūṅkuṇṇaṇār has been wonderfully rendered in English as “All dwelling places are our hometown, all are our kinsmen”, “*mulaiyiḍai tōṇṇiya nōy*” (Avvaiyar, *Akanānūru* 273) – “The disease that originated between the breasts”, “*īṇṇu purantarudal eṇṭalaik kaḍaṇē*” (Poṇṇuḍiyār, *Puranānūru* 312) – “The foremost duty of a woman is to give birth to a son”, “*ācāgu endai yāṇḍuḷaṇ kollō*” (Avvaiyar, *Puranānūru* 235) – “Where is my lord who had been my support”.

When he did not come across any translation for the didactic text, *Paḷamoli Nāṇūru*, he himself has translated the quoted verses simply and strikingly in Chapter 11. For example:

Learned men are those who studied  
and learnt texts worth learning.  
Those learned men's fame  
spread in all four directions.  
No country remains oblivious to them.  
These countries no longer remain alien  
but become their own.  
Hence, there is no need for such men  
to carry food packed on their way!  
(*Paḷamoli Nāṇūru* 4)

Besides these renderings, other fabulous sentences are beautifully inscribed in this translation work, such as:

“Winning women by *kādal* (romantic love) in *akavālvu* (interior life) and conquering land by *pōr* (war) in *puravālvu* (exterior life) were contrived as the hallmarks of man. Subsequently, love and war were projected as the ultimate consciousness of the Tamils.”

“The brimming lust of woman expressed without any hampering of mind had become here the captivating poetic stanzas wherein the tradition of connoting woman as *maḍamagaḷ* (unwise girl/soft speaking woman) and *meṇmaiṅṇaḷ* (soft natured woman) was broke down. It is an important fact to note that the Sangam woman poets in their poems had already rendered the terms *yōṇi* (vagina), *mulai* (breast), etc., that are being employed in their poems by modern Tamil poetesses”.

“Ethical thoughts were neither sent by/coming from a supernatural power, nor were a result of any super miracle, nor either originated in the brain of an individual man. The notion that we come across in any didactic work, in fact, is not wholly the intellectual property of a single author but of the societal collective.”

Furthermore, the translator has deftly interpreted certain unique and fascinating Tamil terms viz. *tiṇaik kōṭpāḍu* into English as “Theory of Poetical Landscape”, *aṇbiṇ aintiṇai* – the five-fold interior landscapes, *kādal* – romantic love, *akavālvu* – interior life, *puravālvu* – exterior life, *kūṭṭukkaḷippu* – conjoint merriment, *kārpolukkam* – chaste love conduct, *aṇanguru karpu* – deified chastity, *parattai* – concubine/mistress, *kāmam* – lust > love, *kāmakkilatti* – lustful concubine/passionate mistress, *kādarparattai* – lovelorn mistress, *parattamai* – adultery/infidelity of a married man, *koṇḍi magaḷir* – enslaved women > harlots, *meyyuru puṇarcci* – physical intercourse, *cirriṇbam* – petty pleasure, *vīḍuṇṇu* – cessation of birth, *mūdiṇ mullai magaḷir* – the senior women of ancient warrior tribes, *maṇakkkuḍi magaḷir* – the women of warrior tribes, *tolpaḷaṇkuḍi* – the ancient aboriginal tribe, *muduvāyppāṇargaḷ* – bards with ancient wisdom, *kuladeyvam* – tutelary deity, etc.

Needless to say, Sangam poetry is unique as group poetry par excellence. It has a character of its own representing the collective mind and group personality of the Sangam age. Taken as a whole, it comfortably exceeds the requirements of great poetry. This book with thirteen chapters speaks a lot about woman poets of Sangam epoch. It covers various great works of the Sangam and Post-Sangam periods, viz. *Akanāṇūru*, *Puranāṇūru*, *Padirruppattu*, *Tirukkural*, *Nālaḍiyār*, *Paḷamoli Nāṇūru*, *Silappatikāram*, *Maṇimēkalai*, etc.

This translation work by Prof. Govindaswamy Rajagopal is delightful to the senses and brings alive a world long past. This book is a commendable model of translation studies in the forte of research writing. I wish the author great success ahead and am fairly certain that his wide academic exposure around the globe and teaching experience in Poland for two years (2011-13) brings his English at ease and the author of the source text, Dr. N. Murugesapandian should be extremely happy on this translation project. It may not be out of context to mention here that more than fifty years ago, my beloved father Dr. Avvai Natarajan also had dealt with all the fascinating themes of Sangam woman poets in his doctoral thesis which deliberated on Sangam Woman Poets (reviewed by Dr. A.K. Ramunujan, University of Chicago, Illinois, USA.). As an alumnus of Delhi University, I am privileged to pen few lines about the translation work of Prof. Govindaswamy Rajagopal and wish him success in all his future endeavours.



(N. Arul)

Date: 13.09.2021



## Note of the Source Book's Author

Among the literary compositions that are being represented by Tamil language, the age-old Tamil classical literary works such as Sangam corpus, Didactic literature, etc., are getting their due attention at present, in tune with the micro-political context. This is associated with or rest on micro-politics. All of a sudden, innumerable Doctoral researches on classical literature have proliferated in the field of Tamil studies. The change in the attitude of proclaiming triumphantly saying: “It is the modern Tamil literature I like. I don’t know the traditional literature”, is welcomed. There arose a need to generate discourses on classical Tamil literature, which are hallmarks of Tamils’ pride. Nowadays, the politics of obliterating all forms of identity are systematically executed. To this critical situation, even the Tamil language is no exception either.

As Globalisation intensifies, pro-corporate politics of homogeneity is rampantly happening on all fronts. Countries like India are becoming new colonies owing to the mythification that Western countries are superior. On the other hand, the activities of religious fundamentalists have created profound impacts on the political and cultural arena in a planned manner. As terms like democracy and citizens have lost their factual meaning, the hands of power are stretched in all directions. In this context, the contribution of art/literature is required to act profoundly in Tamil society. One need not think straightaway that what we mean by the discourse of ancient literature is not speaking of the ancient glory. The fact is



that classical literary works form the basis for the prosperous future of Tamils who have two thousand years of heritage and cultural significance.

Sangam poems pertaining to the *tinai* oriented life naturally generate an understanding of the lost, in the context of an arid environment where the natural ecology of Tamil Nadu is devastated and diversity is ruined. In short, the classical literature is the basis for the restoration of Tamil mythification and identity. In a nutshell, the classical Tamil literature forms the basis for the restoration of Tamil antiquity and identity. The essays in this book are the resultant of a re-reading of the classical Tamil works, through the critical approach imparted by postmodernism. The alternate critical approach of this book rendered to the interpretations that have so far been traditionally uttered by scholars may be irritants to some people. By critically approaching the said the classical Tamil literature in a new way, they are, in fact, getting a new life again. My articles, in fact, have been written putting forth modern litterateurs and Doctoral researchers. There is a possibility that these articles could provide some insight into classical Tamil literature for those who have some extent of literary interest. The purpose of my study is to remove the tight-fitting glazes that have been built in the viewpoint of the traditional way and to find out a way to approach the Sangam classics from a new perspective. The only thing that matters is the discourses and re-discourses that ensue on these articles. As the articles featured in this book were written in different times, some facts are inevitably repeated. I request the readers to bear with the repetitions.

If there is no initiation or effort from Professors viz. A. Dhananjeyan, A. Ramasamy, P. Anandakumar, P. Muthappan, Renuka Devi, K. Pasumpon, K. Parthibaraja, P. Manickavasagam, S. Kalpana, A. Nandini, Amudan, Nagoor Kani and Chandra, who invited me to participate in seminars, then there would have been no possibility of the occurrence of these articles. My thanks to all of them. Thanks to

the editors of the magazines namely *Ungal Noolagam*, *Uyir Ezhuttu*, *Amirdha*, *Thamarai*, *Samooga Vignanam*, *Kaavya*, who published these articles.

My sincere thanks to Professor Dr. Govindaswamy Rajagopal, the translator who has voluntarily and enthusiastically taken up my book in Tamil, *Maṟuvācippil Cevviyal Ilakkiya Paḍaippugaḷ: Paḷantamiḷar Vāḷviyal Paḍivugaḷ* to translate into English. This translation work entitled *Re-reading of Classical Tamil Literary Works: Chronicles of Ancient Tamils' Life* is indeed a testament to his sheer commitment and thorough competence.

Special thanks to Mr. M. VEDIYAPPAN, a dear friend who has come forward to publish this book through his "Discovery Publications", Chennai.

My ever love and bond are there for my beloved wife Usha and my dear children Gautham Raj and Monisha Thangam who are the mainstays for all my writings.

Madurai  
18.11.2021

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## Translator's Note

Tamil, the earliest and living, independent and distinctive language of India has an enviable literary heritage, spanning over a period of 2300 years. It is universally acclaimed for its classical literary treasure called “Sangam literature” (c. 300 BCE–200 CE), comprising *Eṭṭuttogai* (Eight Anthologies) and *Pattuppāṭṭu* (Ten Idylls). It is the first ancient Indian language, formally christened as a classical language of the country on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2004, followed by Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013) and Odia (2014). The Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT) established by the Government of India has identified a sum of Forty-one Tamil works (c. 300 BCE–800 CE) as classical texts. They are *Irāiyaṇār Kaḷaviyal Urai* (the earliest commentary on Tamil love themes by unknown poet), *Tolkāppiyam* (the earliest grammatical treatise now available in Tamil), the Sangam corpus of 18 works, Didactic works 18 viz. *Tirukkural*, *Nālaḍiyār*, *Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru*, *Ācārakkōvai*, to name a few, the first two epics viz. *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, and a unique text *Muttollāyiram* (lit. “Triple Nine-Hundred”), an anthology consists of three sets of 900 verses each, making a total of 2700 verses in all, sung in praise of the three Tamil great rulers viz. Cēraṇ, Cōḷaṇ and Pāṇḍiyaṇ.

Īlampūraṇar, Naccīṇārkkīṇiyar, Cēṇāvaraiyar, Pēraciriyar and other commentators of the medieval period (c. 1000–1200 CE) were the pioneers, who brought out varied facts from the Sangam classics. But

to one's dismay, there was a discontinuity in the exploration of the aforesaid works due to varied socio-political situations that prevailed after the 13<sup>th</sup> century till the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. However, by the tireless endeavours of C.W. Thamotheeram Pillai (1832–1901), U.V. Saminatha Aiyar (1855–1942), R. Raghava Aiyangar (1870–1946), and other erudite scholars, who lived during 1850–1950, the Sangam works were studied deeply and explored intensely. Thereafter, a number of unswerving and outstanding research studies from various perspectives were brought out by several prolific scholars for their academic credentials. The first research study for the Degree of Ph.D. on the Sangam works entitled *Treatment of Nature in Sangam Literature* was successfully conducted by M. Varadarajan, in the year 1947 (published in 1957). Subsequently, countless monumental research works were carried out on ancient Tamil literature. For instance, *Landscape and Poetry – A Study of Nature in Classical Tamil Poetry* by Xavier Thani Nayagam, *Chronology of the Early Tamils* by K.N. Sivaraja Pillai, *Tamil Heroic Poetry* by K. Kailasapathy, *The Tamil Concept of Love in Ahattinai* by V.Sp. Manickam, *Tradition and Talent in Cankam Poetry* by Rm. Periyakaruppan (Tamiḷaṇṇal), *A Critical Study of Kuruntokai* by C. Balasubramanian, *Literary Conventions in Akam Poetry* by Kamil V Zvelebil, *Tamil Love Poetry and Poetics* by Takanobu Takahashi and others.

After the conferment of classical language status on Tamil, innumerable research studies have sprung up like a swarm of moths in academic institutions of Tamil Nadu lately, mainly to secure jobs. Juxtaposed, since the 1990s, a few thoughtful Tamil scholars attempted to critically review/re-read the Sangam classics, Didactic works, and the aforesaid twin epics from divergent viewpoints with the tool of theories of Post-modernism, Post-colonialism, Deconstruction, Feminism, New Historicism, etc. Raj Gauthaman is one such notable critic, who re-read the ancient Tamil works from the standpoint of Dalitism. His research works in Tamil viz. *Pāṭṭum Togaiyum: Tolkāppiyamum Tamiḷc Camūga Uruvākkamum*

(Idylls and Anthologies: Tolkāppiyam and Formation of Tamil Society), *Aram Adhikāram* (Virtues and Power of Authority), *Tamiḻ Camūgattil Aramum Ārralum* (Virtues and Power in Tamil Society) are worth mentioning.

It is strange but a sheer coincidence that three notable research studies on the Sangam classics such as *Sanga Ilakkiyangaḷ Uṇarttum Maṇida Uravugaḷ* (Human Relations Divulged by Sangam Literatures) by Prof. A. Datchinamoorthy, *Sanga Ilakkiyam: Camayam, Valipāḍu, Arasu, Camūgam* (Sangam Literature: Religion, Worship, State and Society) by Prof. A. Pandurangan and *Maṟuvācippil Cevviyaḷ Ilakkiyaḷ Paḍaippugaḷ: Paḷantamiḻar Vāḷviyaḷ Paḍivugaḷ* (*Re-reading of Classical Tamil Literary Works: Chronicles of Ancient Tamils' Life*) by Dr. N. Murugesapandian have been published in the same year i.e. 2016 and by the same publisher namely New Century Book House, Chennai. These three brilliant books have thrown substantial light on the Sangam classics, which remained unexplored until now.

Of the three, the last book, though small in size, covers almost all the 41 texts diligently. Dr. N. Murugesapandian, a promising scholar, who seemingly treads the path of Raj Gauthaman has re-read the classical Tamil texts from radical perspectives, though not exhaustively but strikingly from different standpoints. His book, comprising 13 research articles, has impressed me in many respects—by its themes, approaches, re-readings and language style. The articles—originally presented at various seminars—have been duly published by various Tamil Little Magazines, during 2007–2015, as they commendably merit on their own.

Out of 13 chapters of the book, eight deal with the Sangam classics—five exclusively with woman poets' poetry on love, societal issues, elegy, etc., one with the relationship that existed between poets and ethnic community chiefs, one with Sangam Tamils' religion, and the other with Sangam Tamils' rituals. Of the remaining five

chapters, while one each exclusively deliberates on the Didactic texts viz. *Tirukkuraḷ* and *Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru*, the remaining one generally analyses all Didactic texts to ascertain the place of woman in society. While the last but one research paper discourses on the characterization of Mādhavi, a central character in *Cilappatikāram*, the last one re-reads the second Tamil epic *Maṇimēkalai* from different perspectives.

Fascinated by all articles, barring a few, for their impressive re-readings of the aforesaid classical works, I sincerely wished the book *Maruvācippil Cevviyal Ilakkiyap Paḍaippugaḷ: Paḷantamiḷar Vāḷviyal Padivugaḷ*, written in Tamil, should reach a wider readership through English translation for further understanding of the said texts in the present socio-political-cultural context. As I did not have any prior interaction with the author, I approached him through my beloved friend, Prof. R. Thamocharan *alias* Aravendan (Centre of Indian Languages, School of Language, Literature and Culture, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) to convey my interest of translating his book. My friend, who is well acquainted with the author, briefed him about my credentials and interest to translate his work into English, to which the writer Dr. N. Murugesapandian gladly accepted the proposal.

This is my maiden attempt at translating a book from Tamil to English. It is pertinent to mention that neither do I possess high proficiency in English and nor do I have any knowledge of translation theories. However, I have sincerely committed myself to translate the terms, phrases and sentences of the source language (Tamil) as exactly or precisely as possible into the target language (English). Though the book is by and largely authored in simple and striking sentences, at times translating a good number of lengthy sentences comprising several subjects really posed me a challenge in carrying out the task effectively. Hence, I have rendered those lengthy sentences into two or three parts in English. I have extensively relied on the fine translations, wherever necessary, from the repositories of A.K. Ramanujan, Vaidehi

Herbert, V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, Kausalya Hart, G.U. Pope, Rev. W.H. Drew, Satguru Sivaya Subramaniaswami, and A. Jahir Husain. When I could not come across any translation of the text, *Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru*, I tried myself and translated the quoted verses of the said text in Chapter 11.

It needs to be mentioned here that every statement made in the book are fully the personal views/notions of the author Dr. N. Murugesapandian. Though I disagree with some of his opinions, I have not changed them to suit my personal standpoints. For instance, in Chapter 3, the author while interpreting the close relationship between Avvaiyār, a poetess and Adiyamāṇ, the chief of an ethnic tribe, observes that the bond was likely to be sexual as the former stroked the head of the young lady when he greeted her with a feast. In my opinion, their close relationship seems to be the kind of bond normally seen between father and daughter. Ordinarily in Tamil culture, parents, grandparents and elders stroke affectionately the head of their wards to bless or soothe them at times. Hence, interpreting it differently as the sexual bond is not valid, as per my understanding. If anyone carefully reads the elegy (*Puranānūru* 235) sung by the poetess, can comprehend perfectly the relationship of father-daughter which thrived between them. The poetess, while grieving over the death of the king, deeply mourns, “*ācāgu endai yāṇḍulaṇ kollō*” (“Where is our father who was support to us?”). Referring to the king as *endai* seemingly means “my/our father” or “my/our lord” here. In no way does the poem give room for interpreting it in another way. In Chapter 12, the author mentions that Kōvalaṇ, the male protagonist of the epic *Cilappatikāram*, was indeed a womaniser, who had a sexual relationship not only with Mādhavi, the courtesan but also with her maid Vasantamālai and other women. But there is no tangible evidence in support of this point, either in *Cilappatikāram* or any other text, to my knowledge.

Well, in executing this translation project successfully, the following two Tamil English Dictionaries viz. *Kriyāvin Tarḱālat Tamil*



*Agarādi* (Edited by S. Ramakrishnan, Cre-A Publishers, Chennai, Second Edition, 2008), *Miron Winslow Tamil-English Dictionary* (Edited by Klaus Ludwig Janert, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, Wiesbaden, West Germany, 1977) have been really handy to find equivalent terms for certain Tamil words. And last but not least, the “Google Translate” App has been of much help in this endeavour. In rendering Tamil and Sanskrit terms and names of Tamil texts, “phono-centric” method is adhered to in this book throughout, instead of the conventional transliteration of “scripto-centric”, *albeit Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai, Akanāṇūru*, etc. To render those Tamil/Sanskrit terms exactly as they are pronounced, I have employed the diacritic marks to all the terms as per the scheme of the International Phonetic Alphabets Chart.

In my present endeavour, first I must convey my sincere thanks to Dr. N. Murugesapandian, the author who was kind enough to give his consent for translating his book, *Maṇuvācippil Cevvīyal Ilakkiyap Paḍaippugaḷ: Paḷantamiḷar Vāḷviyal Padivugaḷ* into English. I gladly convey my sincere thanks to Prof. R. Thamoṭharan for helping me to materialise this translation project. I owe to his encouragement and involvement with this assignment.

And I also wish to convey my deepest respect and regards to Dr. G. Gurumurthy, who taught me English during my under graduation (1978-81), for gladly accepting to correct the final draft of this translation work, whom I happened to meet fortunately after 40 years in our Alumni Meet on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at my native place Tiruttani. As an ever spirited and friendly teacher of every student, even after four decades, he enthusiastically took the responsibility of fine-tuning the language of this translation amidst his challenging health condition. He was also kind enough to give suggestions for making the translation errorless and readable. I owe him much for his timely help.

My sincere thanks to my well-wisher, Prof. Vanathu Antoni (Former Senior Fellow, Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi, Delhi-110 007), and to our loveable son Ilamparidi (Advocate, Hon'ble Supreme Court of India), who corrected the first draft of this translation amidst their hectic commitments. My special thanks to Ms. Shruti, Ph.D. research fellow under my guidance, who has meticulously gone through each line of the second draft of this translation, corrected the chapters professionally and provided suggestions to make the manuscript readable.

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## Abbreviations

ĀK	-	Ācārakkōvai
AKU	-	Aiṅkuṛunūru
ANU	-	Akanāṇūru
BCE	-	Before Christ Era
c.	-	<i>circa</i> means “approximately”
CE	-	Christ Era
Comm.	-	Commentator
CPK	-	Cilappatikāram
CPM	-	Cīrupaṇcamūlam
Ed.	-	Editor
Eds.	-	Editors
ed.	-	edition
e.g.	-	<i>exempli gratia</i> means “for example”
et al.	-	<i>et alii</i> means “and others”
etc.	-	<i>et cetera</i> means “and other things”, or “and so forth”
i.e.	-	<i>id est</i> means “that is”
KLT	-	Kalittogai
KRT	-	Kuṛuntogai
lit.	-	literally
MK	-	Maduraikkāñci
MM	-	Maṇimēkalai
MMK	-	Mudumolikkāñci

<i>MPK</i>	-	<i>Malaipaḍukaḍām</i>
<i>NAR</i>	-	<i>Nālaḍiyār</i>
<i>NMK</i>	-	<i>Nāṇmaṇikkaḍigai</i>
<i>NRI</i>	-	<i>Narrinai</i>
p.	-	page
pp.	-	pages
<i>PMN</i>	-	<i>Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru</i>
<i>PNU</i>	-	<i>Puraṇāṇūru</i>
Pub.	-	Publisher
Skt.	-	Sanskrit
Tr.	-	Translation
<i>TKL</i>	-	<i>Tirukkuraḷ</i>
<i>TKM</i>	-	<i>Tirikaḍugam</i>
viz.	-	<i>videre licet</i> means “that is to say”/“namely”



## Sex in Sangam Literature Man-Woman Relationship

Language is the medium through which human social existence transmits its memories and experiences. Human beings could exist without language but there would not be any human society and history. Since language serves as the reminiscence of events or encounters that have occurred in past, it facilitates uninterrupted social mobility by imposing history on humans. Against this background, it is important to understand concepts such as Tamil language, Tamil land and Sangam literature. The territory that Paṇampāraṇār demarcated as “*Vaḍavēṅgaḍam teṅkumari āyiḍait tamīlkūrum nallulagam*” (“In the good part of the world where Tamil is spoken between Vēṅkaṭam in the North and Kumari (Kaṇṇiyākumari) in the South”) has a political goal. With the vast area of land, the Tamil language is thus signposted here. Thereby, the living space of Tamils also got defined. It is no coincidence that the land of Tamils is divided into *aintiṇai* (five landscapes). An attempt to familiarize the land into the public consciousness of Tamil society has been made here through the language. The language identity called “Tamiḷ” then integrated the people who were splintered into different ethnic communities and clans. The natural territory thus converted into consciousness through the language and with the passage of time, the political formation of the country took place. Subsequently, the changing political scenario disrupted the ethnic communities’

traditional lifestyle, rituals, taboos, totem symbols, sacrifices, ancient religious faiths, etc., and triggered a state of emergency for them to adopt a new lifestyle. Hence, love and war—the naturally embedded sensations in human beings, have been given prominence in Sangam literature. Problems arise when an ethnic community conquers its conflicting ethnic community in war and annexes the territory of the defeated with its mainland. In such a context, the integrations of societies brought about by *pāṇar* (bards/minstrels) are significant. It seems that “*Yādum ūrē yāvarum kēḷir*” (“All dwelling places are our hometown, all are our kinsmen”)—the world-famous poem of Kaṇiyaṇ Pūṅkuṇṇāṇār, was sung for the defeated ethnic community or enslaved people. A notion is embedded in the Sangam poems that ‘love’ alone is enough for a young woman of an ethnic community, representing certain *kuḍi* (clan), *gaṇam* (class), *maṇṇadai* (humanity/army) to have a romantic relationship with a youth, from a completely alien community. If romantic love takes place within the same ethnic community, it is unlikely that such prominence is given to literary creation.

The text namely Sangam literature structured on the binaries viz. *akam* (interior feelings) and *puram* (exterior actions) is designed following the crumbling of the then prevailing matrilineal societal structure (however, certain remnants of the matrilineal societal structure are chronicled in the Sangam literature). In the state of co-being, instead of placing woman opposite to man, the attitude of providing prominence only to man evolved. Winning women by *kādal* (romantic love) in *akavāḷvu* (interior life) and conquering land by *pōr* (war) in *puravāḷvu* (exterior life) were contrived as the hallmarks of man. Subsequently, love and war were projected as the ultimate consciousness of the Tamils. In the social ethos of the ethnic community, war denoted the carnival of *kūṭṭukkalippu* (conjoint merriment). By taking over the territory of other ethnic communities by violence, the expansion of ethnic society and the hegemony of the man are then accomplished. In the state of the interior life, the woman’s physical body, including that of other communities, did become a grazing field for man. As a result,

the public consciousness of “land and woman are the subjects under the control of man”, subtly got embedded in the Sangam literature.

During the Sangam era, the feudal society was rising. Vestiges of the ethnic community were much in practice. Some communities had shifted from the state of hunting. People’s agricultural lifestyle was transformed due to forest burning and cattle rearing. Concern for human existence and commitment towards social values were ingrained in the public consciousness through language. It is observed that in the Sangam literature along with the theologies of Buddhism and Jainism, the ideas of Vedic religion were also spread among the public. In this context, an obligation has arisen now to re-read the prevailing notions about the relationships of man and woman of Tamil ethnic communities and the sexual life of those who lived in the Tamil land of the bygone era.

The image of the woman portrayed in the Sangam literature is significant. What are the societal assessments of the woman? What is the compulsion to continually cook up fantasies about the woman? Why does the social set-up attempt to define each of her activities by tying up the woman into the family institution? What is the politics embedded in the sermon that the woman has to wait with patience at home for her departed husband? Likewise, there arise several other questions. It is necessary to study the anecdotal evidence seen in the Sangam literature that tries to portray the woman as a mere body entity by destroying her emotional feelings and sexual desires to the hegemonic character of the man.

The woman’s physical body is closely related to nature. The changes that are caused by menstruation and maternity are mysterious to men. Being a mammal, the woman who naturally loves her children is capable of forming a community around herself over a period of time. For the woman, violence is unwarranted. Once fully grown-up, the man tries to leave his ethnic community and establish his own place. In such a case, when he destroys the opponent communities



and seizes their land, he tries to bring the woman too under his control. The position of woman in the bygone society was merely a substitution in the discourse wherein the *maṟṟam* (valour) and *vīram* (chivalry/gallantry) were stated as the ultimate characteristics of man. In the milieu of societal existence wherein efforts were made to relegate the physical body of the woman to secondary status, she was portrayed as *maḍamagaḷ* (unwise girl/soft speaking woman) and *aṟivu melliyaḷ* (soft natured wise woman). Terms such as *maḍanaḍai* (soft walking), *maḍamā* (soft natured animal) and *maḍamagaḷ* were employed to connote the woman.

“The woman becomes completely matured from the day she attains puberty”—this notion is seen in the Sangam literature. The attitude of approaching the woman with respect to the four stages viz. *kaṇṇi* (a virgin/an unmarried young woman), *kuḍumbat talaivi* (head of the family), *parattai* (concubine/mistress/prostitute), *vidavai* (widow) is continually seen in literature from the Sangam era to the contemporary time. The code of prescription saying, “Only one man shall be the husband for the woman”, was strongly enforced. The conception of a woman having sexual relationship with a man whom she likes outside of the family was not in practice. As a consequence of the prevailing male chauvinistic custom whereby the wealth of man shall pass on to the son by heredity, the ability of a woman to be independent was suppressed and she became completely dependent on man. It is to be noted that the term *kaṟpu* (chastity) in the Sangam literature, has been rendered as connoting the woman’s pure body and pure mind. Waiting patiently at home for the husband who went out either to take part in a war or in search of wealth was considered as a worthy mark of an ideal woman. It has been taught that living with suppression of sexual desire and adhering to gentle qualities while safeguarding the well-being of the husband are noble characteristics of the chaste woman.

The terms such as *kaḍavuḷ kaṟpu* (devout/pious chastity), *vaḍamīṇ pōla kaṟpu* (chastity like that of the Northern Pole Star), *arundati aṇaiya kaṟpu* (chastity like that of Arundati), *aṇanguṟu kaṟpu* (deified

chastity) try to construct the pious fallacies of chastity. Hence, there is no reference describes the woman as having a sexual relationship with the man of her liking, even in situations when she had to earn wealth on her own, or when she was toiling in the state of poverty, or when her husband was leaving her to live with his *parattai* (concubine). It is stressed that the woman should live with the self-control by suppressing her feelings in the institution called the family system, in all situations, living with any kind of issue.

There are references in the Sangam literature which mention about some inhumane practices prescribed for women deceased of husbands such as *vaḷaiyal nīkkudal* (removal of bangles), *muḍi kaḷaidal* (tonsure of hair from the head), *pāyinrip paḍuttal* (sleeping on the floor with no mat) and *iḷai kaḷaidal* (removal of ornaments). But there is no reference even for an assessment/opinion about the customs to be followed by, or the chastity of the man who lost his wife. A woman, who leaves her home to live with the man of her liking, against her parents' wish, is forced to live with his family, with self-control, contentment and chastity.

Another important consequence of a male-dominated society is the creation of *parattamai* (concubinage/prostitution). The Sangam era man wilfully visited his concubine/prostitute even while living with his wife. This state of affairs was not considered a criminal offence when the man received sexual favours from concubines/harlots. It is to be mentioned that the *olukkam* (virtue/good conduct) of the man was not weighed by focussing on his adultery with a concubine/prostitute. The society of the past did not consider the sexual relationship of the man, who is the husband of a woman, with *kāmakkiḷatti* (passionate concubine), *kādarparattai* (lovelorn mistress), etc., as an immoral activity. The description of the conduct of the man, who brought *parattai* (concubine) and had intercourse with her in his home while his wife was present, is not accidental. The wife who justly lives by the norm of chastity could only sulk over her husband's infidelity. That's all she could do.

The social problems encountered by women during the Sangam epoch were innumerable. But it is important to understand why there was a need for men to construct fallacies about women through the Sangam literary texts. The Sangam poems did put forth the esteem of chastity with the agenda of strengthening a platform for the supremacy of man in society.

The place of women in the establishment of the social institution called “family” was supreme. The family system limited the daily chores of women to intercourse for the sake of bearing children, maternity and childbearing as it was so important to produce heirs. Although the *kuḍumbam* (family) constitutes a small unit in society, ideologically it dominates and enables historical continuity. As such there was no term in Tamil referring to *kuḍumbam* in the Sangam literature. The term *kuḍi* (clan) had been used in the sense of connoting *kulu* (community), *kuḍumbam* (family), *ūr* (village/town), *kuḍiyiṇar* (community people), *kuḍiyiruppu* (settlement/colony). The terms viz. *maṇai* (home/house), *il* (home) are in a way closely related to the concept of *kuḍumbam*.

The depiction of the institution called “the family system” in the Sangam literature was centred around the morality of sexuality. The *taṇikkūḍumbam* (independent family) comprising husband, wife and children did exist in the past. The *kuḍumbam* was secondary in the scheme of an ethnic community that was boastful in promoting the pride of the clan. The *kuḍiyiṇ talaivaṇ* (lord of the community) was not as powerful as *kuṟuṇila maṇṇaṇ* (chieftain/lord of a small region). The lord of the ethnic community was economically so poor that he had to mortgage his sword for entertaining his guests. The economic condition of the chief of the ethnic community was so pitiable that the toddy seller refused to give booze on credit to the lord. One has to assess the individuality of women in such conditions of the ethnic community. There was quite a possibility that a multidimensional communication system might have existed during the Sangam aeon,

the period estimated roughly comprising 500 years. But the projection of *kuḍumbappen* (family lady/domestic woman) with the same kind of mannerism by the Sangam texts was not acceptable.

The woman depicted in the Sangam literature had liberty to the extent of choosing the man of her liking, having sex with him and subsequently deciding on the crucial matter *uḍanpōkku* (elopement)—leaving for an alien place along with her lover. Trying to earn the goodwill of the bride's family for marrying the woman by gifting *parisam* (gift of cash, jewels, etc., given to the bride during the ceremony of betrothal) or by staying in the woman's home for a few months—such matrimonial approaches of the man did ensure the woman's worth in society. Such approaches were the remnants of matrilineal society. *Albeit* the marriage was solemnised at the woman's house, the married woman did not live at her parents' home and the children of the woman were not considered as the progeny of the mother's community. These facts are significant in assessing the value of the woman. Relatively, the mother-daughter bond and the mother-son bond are intensely depicted in the Sangam classics. However, we need not comprehend that the woman's place in the family relationship was solid. In the Sangam literature, it was depicted that the life of a woman living with her in-laws was greater than that of her kinsfolk.

It is generally believed that love makes equipoise between man and woman and asserts the individuality of woman. While examining the Sangam literary texts carefully, it is seen that there did exist inequalities between man and woman, who engaged themselves in romantic love. In order to produce a heir to the wealth/property of a man and to protect the social system of an ethnic community, the chaste body of the woman was mandatory as projected in the Sangam love poems. Where a man and a woman toil together, love will exist; whereas there will not be a state of sanctifying love as the sacred one. "Love is so fabulous; divine; sacred; only once does it blossom into one's life; decided upon by God in heaven; a continuum

of the previous birth; all other instances, the splendid one occurring uninterruptedly in every birth”—all such misconceptions, in fact, act wholly against the woman.

In the setting of social edifice, trapping a woman by projecting the idea of “pure love” in need of their bodies for sexual enjoyment, was nothing but an exile for the woman. Projecting the notion, “love” juxtaposed to the natural sexual desire of the woman, who was otherwise freely roaming outside, was an attempt to trap her into the social system. In the milieu of the Sangam era, the equation of man-woman sexual relationship lands into question, since the woman was associated with conceptions viz. *kādal* (romantic love) and *karpolukkam* (chaste love conduct), whereas the man was accredited with *kādal*, *kaḷavoḷukkam* (clandestine love conduct) and *parattamai* (adultery/infidelity of a married man). In the Heroic milieu, when the activities of man such as indulging in battles, winning opposite ethnic communities, making the captured women become *koṇḍi magalir* (enslaved women > harlots) and engaging them in prostitution, were hailed as heroic deeds, the position of the woman remained a question.

As the Sangam poems depict, the position of the woman in the social setting moves towards the centre called “man”. As *kādali* (beloved/ woman in love with a man), *parattai* (concubine), *maṇaivi* (wife), *kāmakilatti* (passionate concubine) and *tōḷi* (girlfriend of a woman who acts as an agent for the sexual union between a *talaivaṇ* and a *talaivi*), the woman’s body is seen as the object of sexual enjoyment. The woman’s body completely loses itself when it is placed at the disposal of the man through the consciousness called “love”. The concept known as “love” was exploited often and again as an intoxication to photocopy the desired body from the suppressed woman’s body, only to be produced again and again and be enslaved by man.

The depictions of love documented in the Sangam literary works projected the objectives of the elite society which functioned with a certain ambitious agenda. There was no trace in the Sangam texts on

the desired *kaḷiyāṭṭangal* (exultations) and *kādal koṇḍāṭṭangal* (love merriments) of the *ēvalargaḷ* (servants), *aḍimaigaḷ* (slaves) and *koṇḍi magaḷir* (enslaved women > harlots).

The people of Sangam society considered sex to be a very natural instinct. No attempt of condemnation, even to an iota, of “sex” was seen as *kuṟram* (crime), *ciṟriṇbam* (petty pleasure) or *tīmai* (evil) in the classical texts. Similarly, there was no attempt at focussing on *pāluravu* (sexual intercourse) and making over of *kāmam* (lust > love) as *kāmakkalai* (the art of sex) by severing the former from the body. The trend of considering the relationship between the man and woman as quite normal is being depicted in the Sangam literature. The sexual desire of the woman waiting at home overflows at times when the sexual excitement of the man decreases due to his obsession over with *pōr* (battle/war), *nāḍu* (country) and *uḍaimai* (wealth). In such a situation, it was suggestively hinted in some poems, how and in what manner one can face the sexual desire.

The Sangam literary convention accorded importance to the physical and mental experiences of the man and woman and to the resultant changes that emerge on three states of affair such as *pāliyal viruppam* (sexual desire), *punarcci* (sexual intercourse) and *kalaiviyiṇbam* (pleasure of sexual intercourse). The *kādalaṇ* (lover/a man in love with a woman) immensely rejoices upon getting the sexual pleasure from his *kādali* (beloved). One man utters, he does not need even half a day’s life, once he has sexual intercourse with his ladylove. One love-stricken woman cries that she was suffering from unbearable pain as she got inflicted by *kāmanōy* (disease of lust/illness of passion). One woman shares her blissful experience of love-making with her man to her *tōḷi* (girlfriend) as follows:

... .. vēṭṭōrkku  
amiḷdat taṇṇa kamaḷtār mārbiṇ  
vaṇḍiḍaip paḍāa muyakkamum  
taṇḍāk kādalum talaināl pōṇmē  
(Kabilar, *Akanāṇūru* 332: 12-15)

It is like it was on the first day,  
 the embraces of his nectar-like  
 chest donning a fragrant garland,  
 without bees coming between us,  
 and my unshakable love for  
 the man .....  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>1</sup>

The Sangam literature depicts sexual intercourse as a natural act between a man and a woman, who fall in romantic love in unison. Both the lovers, who are amply interested in sex, indulge in the act together with so much passion. When separation occurs in their life due to some reason or other, they lament and languish with the feeling of sexual passion. *Lovers, indulging in sexual intercourse before their marriage was recognised during the Sangam time.* The word *kādal* (romantic love) is seen very closely referring to the term *kāmam* (lust/passion). It is distressful for the woman when her youth fades away without being enjoyed by the man. In the social setting, where efforts were made to barricade the woman's space of mobility and her thinking, there was a favourable condition for expressing her sexual feelings without any hesitation. The lust of women was just eulogized for reproducing the male's (physical) bodies which were required for taking part and dying in the battles that arose between ethnic communities. The very first line in the *Puranānūru* (PNU) poem (312), “*īṇru purantarudal eṇtalaik kaḍaṇē*” (“To bring forth and rear a son is my foremost duty”) indicates the identity of the woman (It is to be compared and comprehended here that there was no reference with regard to the girl-child in the Sangam literature). *Kāmam* (lust) then existed as the gateway of pleasure for the man and woman possessed similar thoughts and had the blissful sexual fulfilment by *meyyuru puṇarcci* (physical intercourse). There are quite a number of poems in the Sangam literature that express the lustful feelings of women.

*muṭṭu vēṇkol? tākku vēṇkol?*  
*ōṇē yāṇumōr perri mēliṭṭu*  
*āa olleṇak kū vēṇkol?*

*alamaral acaivaḷi alaippaven  
uyavunōy ariyādu tuṇcum ūrkkē  
(Avvaiyār, Kuruntogai 28)*

Will I hit them? Will I attack them?  
Will I scream ‘Ah’ and ‘Ol’ citing  
some reason?  
swirling wind blows and causes  
me distress, while those in this town  
are sleeping unaware of my love  
affliction.  
I do not know what to do?  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>2</sup>

“Without knowing the severity of my lovesickness, the breeze unwittingly blows; without knowing this, the town sleeps. How can I state my deplorable condition? *Muṭṭuvēṇā? Tākkuvēṇā? Kūvuvēṇā?* (“Will I hit? Will I attack? Will I scream?”)”. Thus, the poem of Avvaiyār did accurately portray the passionate mind of a woman. The woman also appears to have a sense of merrymaking in enjoying sexual pleasure. The sexual passion of a man in general on the opposite sex is centred around physical intercourse. Whereas, the passionate love feeling of the woman is seen subtly expanding on various domains/levels. The passion of a woman expands on a multidimensional level with the satisfaction of just seeing the arrival of the lover and leaning on his chest. Ignoring the sensual passion, the woman feels happy just by the thought of putting forth the man’s love and his bond with her.

*kāmam oḷiva dāyinuṁ yāmattuk  
karuvi māmaḷai vīṇḍeṇa aruvi  
viḍaragat tiyambu nāḍavem  
toḍarbu tēyumō niṇṇvayī ṇāṇē  
(Kabilar, Kuruntogai 42)*

O Lord of the mountain country,  
where night’s heavy downpours  
roar down the crevices  
of mountain slopes, as waterfalls!



Even you do not unite with her,  
 will her love for you fade away?  
 No! It will not!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>3</sup>

The woman's psyche—devoid of *kāmam*—hailing the relationship of her man is completely unknown to the latter. Relying upon her psyche, the passion of the woman expands when it is compared with the sexual desire of the man, who desires to bring the woman's body under his control by ignoring the former's psyche for exercising authority over her.

As attracted towards something of the societal life in the outer world for some reason or other, the man wanders here and there. But the woman waits at home for the man. Her heart aches; laments just thinking of separation.

*uḷḷār kollō tōḷi uḷḷiyum*  
*vāyppuṇarvu inmaiṇ vārār kollō*  
*mararpuḡā arundiya māveruttu iralai*  
*urarkāl yānai oḍittuṇḍu eñciya*  
*yāa varinilar ruñcum*  
*māyiruñ cōlai malaiyiṇan dōrē!*  
 (Ūṇpittai, *Kuruntogai* 232)

Does he think about you, O friend?  
 Even if he thinks, will be able to  
 come back until he's finished with  
 what he has set out to do, the man  
 who crossed the mountain with huge groves,  
 where a stag with a large neck, after  
 eating hemp plants, sleeps in the  
 meagre shade of the remains of a yā  
 tree, after an elephant with feet that  
 look like large stone mortars, broke  
 and ate its branches?  
 Yes. He will return on time!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>4</sup>

The sexual passion rests entrenched in the woman's distress on separation of her man, thinking that the lover who departed to an alien place through the dense forest might have forgotten her or might have settled there, after completing his business when there was no chance for him to return to her place. Her sexual passion extremely overflows in distress when her man had not returned even after the beginning of *kārkālam* (rainy season), who earlier while leaving told her that his chariot would overtake the start of the rainy season and he would surely reach her place on time. She awaits him with no fulfilment of her sexual desire.

The despair of the married woman is immeasurable when her man, who went away and began staying at the place of his *parattai* (concubine). "Who are you to quarrel with us? What kind of relation we are to sulk with you? You can go to the place of your *parattai*. Who is there to stop you?" Thus, the woman anguishes. Aḷḷūr Naṇmullaiyār so diligently depicted the agony of the distressed woman who was pondering over in helpless situation due to the separation of the man who went away.

During the Sangam period, women had acquired knowledge of literacy through formal education; many women had composed poems. There are forty-one female poets' names mentioned in the anthologies compiled by men. In the poetry of the Sangam poetesses, the details with regard to the woman's status, psyche and body are fascinating and uniquely described; they intensely pen-pictured the woman's sexual feeling in depth. The poetess Veḷḷivīdiyār thinks the woman's body becomes fulsome only after the delivery of a child.

*kaṇṇum uṇṇādu kalattiṇum paḍādu*  
*nallāṇ tīmpāl nilattuk kāangu*  
*eṇakkum āgādu eṇṇaikkum udavādu*  
*pasalai uṇṇiyar vēṇḍum*  
*tidalai alguleṇ māmaik kaviṇē.*  
 (Veḷḷivīdiyār, *Kuṇṇutogai* 27)

My dark beauty and the spots  
on my loins will do me no good,  
nor will they benefit my lover,  
since pallor has ruined them.

It is like a fine cow's sweet milk  
being wasted on the ground  
without feeding its calf or  
being milked into a pail.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>5</sup>

She was worried that her splendid beauty was being wasted without being useful to her husband and even for herself, as pallor spread over her beautiful loins like the way the sweet milk of a good cow was wasted falling upon the ground, without feeding its calf or being milked into a vessel. Without any hesitation, the woman who was deprived of sexual pleasure with her man candidly expressed her disappointment after perfectly recognizing her feminine body yearning for the physical enjoyment of the man whom she liked.

One woman sleeps with longing when her much-loved man fails to turn up, after promising that he would surely return before the night. One poem penned by Kaccippēṭṭu Naṇṇāgaiyar, so beautifully outlined the deep psyche of the woman's arousal of sexual feelings and her confusion. Having the dream of enjoying sex with her beloved man, the woken-up woman then gropes around the area of bed only to find that he is not there and thereby she becomes confused.

The following stanzas of a poem (176) in *Kuṟuntogai* (*KRT*) anthology, composed by Varumulaiyāritti, very fascinatingly expressed the agony of a woman who was deeply distressed due to the separation of her lover: "Where is he, the man who came many days, befriended, spoke kindly to us and melted our heart? I wonder where is he now, our good Lord?"

The woman's body by nature has a unique identity as *mulai* (breast), *alguḷ* (loins) and *tāy vayīru* (*karuppai*, the uterus). Though the

poetesses have rendered sexual connotations over the body parts of a woman, yet their views are unique in many aspects.

It is to be mentioned here that the poetess Avvaiyār very minutely described the sexual psyche of a woman waiting at home for her husband who went away in search of wealth.

*ventīrar kaḍuvaḷi pongarp pōṇḍeṇa  
nerruviḷai uḷiñcil varral ārkkuṁ  
malaiyuḍai aruñcuram eṇbanam  
mulaiyiḍai muṇinar ceṇṇa ārē.  
(Avvaiyār, Kuruntogai 39)*

They say that the path he took,  
the man who hated lying on my  
breasts,  
is through the wasteland with  
mountains,  
where hot, fierce winds blow  
against *vākai* tree branches,  
rattling their dried seed pods.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>6</sup>

In this above-mentioned poem, the woman pines that her husband, instead of sleeping on her breasts, went away through the path of wasteland with mountains where severe heat prevails and winds blow. When we think about the theme viz. “separation”, it is observed that the sexual desire is being so naturally depicted in the Sangam poems. It is the hallmark of Tamil classical literature.

There are plenty of things to learn with regard to sex from the poetry of the Sangam *akam* poems. This is because, after the Sangam era when religions dominated the life of Tamils, sex became a negative feature. Merriments of the body were ignored. The notions such as observing meditation by distressing the body, shedding the body for attaining the *vīḍupēru* (cessation of birth/salvation), etc., ridiculed the sexual intercourse as an act of shame. Sex became an act associated with a guilty psyche. Belittled as *cirriṇbam* (petty pleasure), the

neglected sex malformed the humans as mere physical bodies suffering under the control of power. When we think about it, sex enjoyed by the man and woman with similar traits and thoughts is a great fortune; fabulous.

Today fundamentalist religious organizations are trying to penetrate deep into Tamils' life. They seek to turn women into mere child-bearing machines, as perceived by Hitler's fascist government. On one hand, it is, indeed, a very alarming situation, to have a surging number of cultural cops' who want to condemn and curtail everything, right from the clothing to the behaviour of women. On the other hand, the younger generation has become depressed due to the generous offering of pornography and sexual perversion videos. A welcoming attitude is needed today to discard the misunderstanding of sex and to consider it natural. In this context, the depiction of Sangam poems' natural view on sex renders multidimensional readings in re-reading. It is a historical irony, today's generation, the descendants of the Tamils who lived over two thousand years ago, are in a situation to learn about the nuanced feeling called "sex".

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### Notes

1. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-301-400/>
2. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-1-200/>
3. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-1-200/>
4. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-201-400/>
5. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-1-200/>
6. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-1-200/>

## Societal Chronicles

### Sangam Woman Poets' Description

Generally, fables such as the ones of the Sangam era, signifying the ancient Tamils' pride, golden age or a rise of *mūvēndar* (Cēra, Cōla and Pāṇḍiya kings) are put forward. We must approach the Sangam poetry by ignoring such politics of lauding the Sangam literary works as the esteemed texts of ancient glory. Their poetic language and sentence construction are extremely excellent and unique. The enlargement of territory as a five-fold landscape depicted through poetry is quite fascinating. The scenes that unfold with the splendour of nature evoke new experiences in reading. The fusion of *polūdu* (season) with *nilam* (land), with *kūdirkkālam* (dew season) in *kuṛiñci* (mountain region) to *vēṇirkālam* (summer season) in *pālai* (desert region) give charm to the poem. Sangam poetry is not the text projecting simply the aesthetics alone. When we come across the excellent description of various aspects of the social life of an ethnic community, we comprehend the authority of the patrilineal community through those works. Conquering land by war in *puravālvu* (exterior life) and winning women by *kādal* (romantic love) in *akavālvu* (interior life) were contrived as hallmarks of man. The land and body of a woman became the centres of enjoyment for men.

The Sangam poems fulfilled the necessity of transforming the woman's natural lifestyle and her feelings according to the requirement of

patrilineal society. Expecting a woman to fully depend on man and immerse herself in the institution called “family”, lies implicitly in the politics of male’s authority. Excessive deliberations and merriments on *kādal*, in fact, are machinations in favour of the attitude against woman’s body by limiting it to four stages viz. *kānni* (a virgin), *maṇaivi* (wife), *vidavai* (widow) and *parattai* (concubine). Uttering fables on chastity to the woman who was courageous enough of undertaking *uḍanpōkku* (elopement)—leaving for an unknown place along with lover and indulging in sex before marriage, is nothing but the zenith of power. The Sangam literature highlighted the situation regarding the emergence of the empire in Tamil land and the requirement of the body of a woman to deliver male children to wage wars/battles. There are some poems found in the Sangam classics that spoke against this attitude.

Altogether 473 poets authored the Sangam poems. The names of some poets are unknown. However, 181 poems penned by 41 woman poets are featured in the Sangam anthologies. With the said information, one can raise several questions. “When were these poems compiled?”, “What were the aims of those poems?”, “What were the principles followed by the compiler?” As there was no single name of woman compiler in the list, does it give prominence to the opinions of male supremacy?”

There is a possibility that hundreds of woman poets might have composed poetry during the Sangam era. They must have been disregarded due to the compiler’s bias of mind and aim. Therefore, it is important in the societal paradigm that women were literates and had authored poetry during the Sangam epoch. Subsequently, it is only the poems of Kāraikkāl Ammaiṃār and Āṇḍāl that were listed in Tamil literature. Why was there an interval in the continuity of dynamic poems composed by Sangam woman poets during this period? The notions such as a woman being subdual and repressed under the protection of the man shrunk the mobility of the woman

and further crippled her to suffer at home. It is very distressing that until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, roughly for about 1700 years, women lived in deplorable conditions without any identity or individuality, and their bodies were considered as the grazing field for men's enjoyment. It is, indeed, a striking fact that 41 women in comparison with men had authored several poems during the Sangam era. In a way, it needs to be celebrated.

Did poems of Sangam poetesses emanate with the distinctiveness of poetry? Did women compose poetry in the language of man by acquiring the prevailing public perception of the day? How to deal with them in today's situation? Such questions naturally do arise now. By understanding the persona of the poetesses of ancient Tamil tradition, one can be aware of the origin and unique characteristics of the contemporary woman poets' poetic language, possessing a woman's gendered identity. We can take note of criticisms of society prevalent against the woman's image constructed with the projection of *kādal* and *karpu* conventionally.

There is a widespread perception that the life of Sangam Tamils centred around *kādal* and *vīram*. The fables depicting the romantic love as sacred, a continuum of the previous birth, or prolonging relationship in the succeeding birth, etc. that are fashioned on *kādal* wholly aim at the woman. The morality of restricting a woman's sexual passion by postulating certain norms like *kādal* and *karpu* as mandatory attributes for a woman, who was otherwise freely moving on her own terms, in the matrilineal societal set-up is a trick to keep the woman as subordinate. However, *kādal*, *kaḷavoḷukkam* (clandestine love conduct) and *parattamai* (adultery/infidelity of a married man) were for man which, in fact, dissipates the equation of man-woman position. On another level, this is a trick to keep the woman as a subordinate. In this condition, the frequented space of a woman shrinks with her husband and child within the institution called "family". Some woman poets had also espoused the convention



of the Sangam literature and defined in their poetic compositions that woman connotes gentleness.

Half of the poems penned by Sangam woman poets put forth a heart-wrenching theme, i.e. separation of a woman from her man. The life of the man happens somewhere outer sphere as *poruḷ* (wealth), *kalvi* (education), *pōr* (battle), *viṇai* (action) and *parattamai*. The woman who naturally loves her children waits at home. The Sangam poems attempted to construct fables of subduing the sexual act of woman as simply the one who waits for her husband to return on an unknown day; highlighting the feelings of a surged heart that emanate on separation.

Woman's anxiety and sorrowfulness are beautifully essayed in the poems that deliberate on the theme of "separation". When we analyse the grief of a woman involved in romantic love, her lover seems to be from a different ethnic community or territory. A woman no need to meltdown so much over the romantic love of a man, if he belongs to the same ethnic community. It can be said that the Sangam literary texts endorsed the love poems containing dramatic characteristics for creating an attitude of accepting a man from other ethnic communities. Contact with a man of other ethnic communities or the lord of other *ūr* (dwelling place/village/home town) and his relationship tormented the woman. For instance, a poem in the *Narriṇai* (*NRI*) anthology, penned by Vellivīdiyār describes the agony of woman as, "O small white heron! You are not conveying my illness to my beloved man that I am afflicted with love that my jewels are slipping down. Are you such a beloved bird? Or, are you a bird having poor memory? I am unable to understand you" (*NRI* 70). In this poem, one can grasp the elegiac feeling of the woman lamenting due to the separation of her lover.

In a situation where there was no communication concerning the whereabouts of the man who went away, the condition of woman's survival at home with endurance postulates an important question regarding the existence of her husband, who went away through the

trajectory of deadly *pālai* (desert region/barren track), wild forest and jungle animals, which in itself remains a query. That is why a kind of sadness reverberated in most poems on the theme of separation as follows: “I am waiting the whole night without sleeping in the solitude of distress, for my beloved man” (*Veļlivīdiyār*, *NRI* 348); “The rainy season has come with heavy showers accompanied by lightning and thunder; cold winds are blowing and winter is here, appearing like *Emaṇ* (God of Death) coming toward me” (Kaccippēṭṭu Naṇṇāgaiyār, *Kuruntogai* (*KRT*) 197); “Whether my lover, who has gone away through the parched wasteland, thinks about me, my friend?” (Aļļūr Naṇmullaiyār, *KRT* 67). Likewise, one can see such lamentations of a woman, suffering on separation, intensely depicted in such kinds of poems of woman poets. The remark of the poetess Kaccippēṭṭu Naṇṇāgaiyār (*KRT* 192) that one woman, whose husband was away, stroked her thick and dried hair without applying oil to it, was, perhaps, the outcome of society’s restraints imposed on the woman during that period.

In the state of affairs where the separation was considered natural due to her husband’s infidelity of seeking pleasure from *parattai* (concubine), the only thing a woman could do was to sulk with him when he returns home. The appeal placed before the woman by Sangam literary texts was that the man should be accepted the way he was and endured into the institution called “family”, even if he lives with many *parattaigaļ* (concubines) with the passion of lust. Aļļūr Naṇmullaiyār expressed the attitude of male dominance in a different perspective.

*cērrunilai muṇaiiya ceṇkaṭ kārāṇ*  
*ūrmaḍi kangulil nōṇṭaļai parindu*

.....  
*vaṇḍūdu paṇimalar ārum ūra!*  
*yārai yōniṛ pulakkēm .....*

.....  
*ceṇri perumanir ṛagaikkunar yārē?*  
*(Akanāṇūru 46)*

Oh man from the town,  
 where, hating to stand in the  
 mud, a red-eyed buffalo tied  
 to a strong rope broke loose,  
 lifted a sharp thorn fence,  
 jumped into a pond .....

.....

Who are you to us to quarrel?

.....

Lord! You can go where you want to go!  
 Who is there to stop you?  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>1</sup>

“What relationship do you have to quarrel with us? You can go to your mistress’s place. Who is there to stop you?” Thus, we hear the furious voice of a helpless woman, which is toned down in self-pity that is reflectively delineated in the above-mentioned splendid poem, since she could not stop her husband from visiting *parattai* as the latter was thinking that visiting his concubine was his right as a man.

While hailing the carnival of love, we notice that some prevailing facts of the tradition were implicitly postulated in the Sangam poetry that dictated women not to express their love or lust explicitly at any cost. While this tradition was profoundly followed by male poets, the female poets daringly violated the said tradition. In a way, this was a challenge thrown against male’s dominance. Besides expressing the feelings of love and lust openly, the woman poets poetically chronicled the pathetic ailment of their body parts, having aroused with sensual emotions of the passionate love.

The following poem, penned by Veļļivīdiyār, penetratingly portrays the emotion of a woman, who was possessed by romantic love.

*kanrum unṇādu kalattiṇum paḍādu*  
*nallāṇ tīmpāl nilattuk kāangu*  
*eṇakkum āgādu eṇṇaikkum udavādu*

*pacalai uṇṭiyar vēṇḍum*  
*tidalai alguleṇ māmaik kaviṇē.*  
*(Kūṟuntogai 27)*

My dark beauty and the spots  
 on my loins will do me no good,  
 nor will they benefit my lover,  
 since pallor has ruined them.

It is like a fine cow's sweet milk  
 being wasted on the ground  
 without feeding its calf or  
 being milked into a pail.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>2</sup>

The *talaivi* (heroine, a dramatic persona) feels sad about the spreading pallor over her beautiful loins being wasted by neither being of any use to her husband nor to her, just like the sweet milk of a cow being wasted by falling upon on the ground, without feeding its calf or being milked into a vessel. The brimming lust of woman expressed without any hampering of mind had become here the captivating poetic stanzas, wherein the tradition of connoting woman as *maḍamagaḷ* (unwise girl/soft speaking woman) and *meṇmaiyaṇavaḷ* (soft natured woman) was broke down. It is an important fact to note that the Sangam woman poets in their poems had already rendered the terms *yōṇi* (vagina), *mulai* (breast), etc., that are being employed in their poems by modern Tamil poetesses. Among the poems of romantic love ever composed in Tamil, there is a special place for Aḷḷūr Naṇmullaiyār's poem which has the 'feminine language'. The passion of a romantic woman lively emerges out in the following poem through a fleeting scene.

*kukkū eṇṇadu kōḷi adaṇedir*  
*tuṭkeṇ raṇṇreṇ tūu neṇcam*  
*tōltōy kādalarp pirikkum*  
*vālpōl vaigaṇai vandaṇṛāl eṇavē.*  
*(Kūṟuntogai 157)*

Coo Coo,  
 crowed the rooster and my  
 pure heart pounded in fear,  
 since dawn struck  
 like a sword to separate me  
 from the embraces of my lover.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>3</sup>

Upon hearing the growl of a cock, the woman who was in the bed with her lover, becomes instantly anxious as she realised that the dawn was up and she would now be separated from him, who was resting on her shoulder. The heartbeat of the perturbed woman has transformed into lovely stanzas of the above quoted poem. The relationship of a woman with her lover was, perhaps, clandestine. So, her relatives and other people of society possibly were unaware of their bond or the man who rested on her shoulder could be her loving husband. Whatever it may be, since the dawn was approaching fast, their state of being united posed a problem that forced them to get separated. If the man happened to be her lover, it is not possible to know when and where they would have sex again. If he was her husband, she had to wait until the next night. The stanzas describing the man-woman romantic bond, more so the yearning of a passionate woman in the thick flow of love, pleasingly depict the depth of romantic love.

“The breeze blows me away unaware of the cruelty of love. *Ūr* too sleeps unaware of it. How can I tell my situation to the people of my village?” Thus laments a passionate woman, sketched by the poetess Avvaiyār.

*muṭṭu vēṇkol? tākku vēṇkol?*  
*ōrēṇ yāṇumōr perri mēliṭṭu*  
*āa olleṇak kūvu vēṇkol?*  
*alamaral acaivaḷi alaippaveṇ*  
*uyavunōy ariyādu tuṇcum ūrkkē*  
 (Kuruntogai 28)

Will I hit them? Will I attack them?  
 Will I scream ‘Ah’ and ‘Ol’ citing  
 some reason?  
 swirling wind blows and causes  
 me distress, while those in this town  
 are sleeping unaware of my love  
 affliction.  
 I do not know what to do?  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>4</sup>

Thus expresses the anguished woman. The woman, unable to withstand the surge of lustful feelings being in the state of solitude, screams, “*Muṭṭuvēṇā* (Will I hit them?), *Tākkuvēṇā*? (Will I attack them?), *Kūvuvēṇā*? (Will I scream?)”. Such expression corrodes the trend of romantic love advocated by the legacy of men.

The feelings of lust depicted by Veḷḷivīdiyār stir our souls while reading. “The bright moon rises to the sky; the swelling ocean’s waves hit the shores relentlessly and loudly; an *anril paravai* (Glossy Ibis) cries in pain and distress from the top of a big, dark palmyra tree; a *yāl* (Lute, a stringed musical instrument) is stroked all night with no break. Of all of these, my desire is great, but my lover—the man who can extinguish the sexual distress, is not here” (*NRI* 335). In the luscious mood of the state of mind, the woman’s distress yearning for her lover’s company magnifies without any blockage. Such disposition of woman is a vestige of the matrilineal society.

The lust of the woman depicted in the Sangam literature is multifaceted. It should be noted here that the lust of the man curtails into a single discourse that is aimed toward the centre known as “sexual intercourse”. Leaning on her lover’s chest, besides his romantic look, arrival and intimacy is sufficient for a woman. Neutralising a woman’s lust is an important aspect in the sphere of the man-woman relationship, as chronicled in the compositions of woman poets.

Another important feature seen in the poems of poetesses is the unconstrained descriptions of the woman’s body parts such as *mulai*

(breast), *algul* (vagina) and *karuvayiru* (uterus). While the lust of man is heaped on in one place, that of the woman's is spread all over her body. Woman poets depict *mulai* as the source of women's lust. The poetess Avvaiyār in a poem (*Akanāṇūru* 273) lauds *kādal*, the romantic love, as "*mulaiyiḍai tōṇṇiya nōy*" ("the disease that originated between the breasts"). Further, she extolls as follows:

*malaiyuḍai aruṇcuram eṇbanam*  
*mulaiyiḍai muṇinar cenra ārē.*  
 (*Kuruntogai* 39)

They say that the path he took,  
 the man who hated lying on my  
 breasts,  
 is through the wasteland with  
 mountains, .....  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>5</sup>

In the aforesaid poem, the *talaivi* expresses her concerns to her *tōli* that her lover having despised lying on her breasts that gave him warmth and pleasure, went through the harsh wasteland containing mountains where the hotter and fierce wind blows. From her description, we can comprehend that the breasts, which gave pleasure to her man when he was lying on them, were in a desperate situation now to seek pleasure from the same man who departed away.

According to the proclivity of a poem, some woman poets talk about woman's body parts in their poems. For instance, Kaccippēṭṭu Nannāgaiyār and Veḷḷivīḍiyār refer to *algul* (loins) respectively as "*algul avvari vāḍat turandōr*" ("The man who has left me causing beauty spots on loins to fade away"), (*KRT* 180) and Veḷḷivīḍiyār "*tidalai algul eṇmāmaik kaviṇē*" ("Spots on loins on mound my dark beauty"), (*KRT* 27). Another poetess Poṇmuḍiyār, while describing adornments and accomplishments of royal horses as analogues in her poem in the *Puranāṇūru* (299) anthology, states "Even though the garlanded horses with trimmed manes, belonging to rich kings with fertile towns, eat food mixed with ghee, they stand in fear like women

who do not touch bowls in the temple of fierce Murugaṇ.” From this description, we understand that though women in the Sangam era were allowed to go to the Murugaṇ temple during the menstruation period, they were afraid of touching the bowls in the temple as they were scared of the fierce god. Perhaps, Poṇṇuḍiyār was the first woman poet to mention about menstruation in Tamil literature.

Even after the exterior act called “war” became wholly the domain of man, there were references about *mūḍiṇ mullai magalir* (the senior women of ancient warrior tribes), *maṟakkkuḍi magalir* (the women of warrior tribes) in some compositions of poetesses. In this manner, the primacy was extended to the valour of the ethnic community which indulged in war to establish the authority of man, just like the grander act of a mother sending her male children to take part in the battles. The female poets who composed heroic poems lauded the valour of male children. But nowhere the competence of female children was sung. The poetesses had also boasted about valour in support of patriarchal society.

The following references from *Puraṇāṇūru* anthology amply corroborate the aforesaid fact. “When an old woman, with grey hair like the feathers of fish-eating storks, heard that her son was killed slaying an elephant, she felt more joy than on the day when she gave birth to him” (Pūṇkaṇuttiraiyār, *PNU* 277); “I do not know where will be my son?” But this womb, which was like a mountain cave that a tiger inhabited and abandoned, is the same womb that gave birth to him. He will appear on the battlefield! (Kāvaṛpeṇḍu, *PNU* 86).

One aged woman became instantly enraged when she heard others say that her son showed his back and died while running away from a ferocious battlefield. Then she thunders, “I will cut off these breasts that fed him the milk if it is so” (Kāḱkaipāḍiṇiyār Naccheḷḷaiyār, *PNU* 278). Thereafter, “She went to the battlefield with a sword in her hand. She turned over everybody lying on the blood-soaked battlefield. She finally found her son who was chopped to pieces and felt happier than the day she gave birth to him” (*Ibid.*).



“Enemies chopped up a warrior who turned his sword forged in fire towards them, guided his fellow warriors through the battlefield where spears and arrows were thrown, split the advancing forces, blocked them standing between armies and got chopped up, a great man. On seeing the great warrior’s dead body, his mother with a strong will saw his nobility, felt tender and her withered breasts secreted milk” (Avvaiyār, *PNU* 295).

On an inauspicious day on the battlefield, a woman lost her father—a warrior who killed an elephant and then fell on the same battlefield. After a couple of days, she lost her husband who drove back rows of warriors who came for cattle and was killed in the battle. The very next day, when she heard the roaring sound of battle drums, desire rose in her. Overwhelmed, she who had nobody other than her only young son, placed a spear in his hands, smeared oil in his dry hair tuft, covered him with white cloth and bade him march towards the battlefield (Okkūr Mācāttiyār, *Ibid.*, 279). Another woman who was seemingly very proud of reproducing male children for such activities proclaims, “To bring forth and rear a son is my foremost duty” (Poṇmuḍiyār, *Ibid.*, 312).

In such a manner, the woman poets tried to depict warrior tribe women with certain attributes. “Giving birth to male children and feeling proud of their death in battles are indeed the hallmark characteristics of warrior tribe women”, thus the female poets emphasized for the sake of protecting the community in which they lived in and for taking part in battles for the well-being of *kurunila manṇargaḷ*. The Sangam poets tried to construct a public consciousness of hailing certain traits as gallantry/valour, which cut off the close relationship between mother and son and sacrifice of her son on the battlefield in the name of politics or safeguarding their country. It is impractical to hail the death of men in the battles between ethnic communities or lords of small regions as the *vīram* of ancient Tamils and the golden age of Tamils.

The cruelty done by the society in the name of *kaimmai* (widowhood) to warrior tribe women, who sacrificed bravely for the benefits of society, was inestimable. Urging a woman who lost her husband in a battle to have *nīrccōru* (boiled rice mixed with water), *eḷḷuttuvaiyal* (sesame chutney), *vēḷaikkīrai* (a kind of spinach/Gynandropsis Pentaphylla) mixed with tamarind and to sleep on stone, could have been prevalent among some Tamil ethnic communities.

Until recently, women having such a kind of widowhood life of tonsuring hair and eating *alli arici* (lily seeds) had prevailed in some regions. It was described in the poems of Peruṅkōppenḍu, Mārōkkattu Nappacalaiyār and Tāmakkanniyaṛ that instead of facing the horrors of *kaimmai nōṇbu* (widowhood fasting) for the sake of living, it was better to die. Against the decree of the ancient Tamil Nadu, considering a woman as the entity of a mere body and thereby pronouncing a diktat that it was appropriate for her to live in the home, the poetesses muttered against the practice of marginalizing her as a barren land after the death of her husband.

Though the dictums of the patrilineal society are prominently found in the poetry of the Sangam woman poets, vestiges of the matrilineal society are also chronicled here and there. It is found that expressing about their body parts by woman authors through their creative works had begun during the Sangam time itself. It is the special characteristic attribute of poetesses that they brought out romantic love and passion of lust into fine poetry without any hang-up against the tradition of the past. In the male-dominated society, though women agreed to stay oppressed at multiple levels by respective authorities, their resistant voices and individualities got chronicled through poetry. The language and poetic prowess of the Sangam woman poets, indeed, fascinate modern readers, too. There are several specifics for contemporary young poets to learn from the Sangam woman poets.

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**Notes**

1. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-1-100/>
2. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-1-200/>
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5. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-1-200/>

## Relationship between Chiefs of Ethnic Tribes and Poets in Sangam Literature

The poems of Sangam classics deftly carried out the mission of uniting a group of ethnic people with society through the medium of language, besides labelling them as Tamils. The poems of the bygone era united ancient people (who lived in harmony with nature) with space and time. The huge territory as defined, having the boundaries of “*Vaḍavēṅgaḍam Tenkumari*” [Vēṅkaṭam (Tirupati) in the North and Kumari (Kanniyakumari) in the South] materialized only because of Tamil. The demarcation of Tamil’s frequented land presumably has the backdrop of micro-politics. The discourse on Sangam Age has been conceived by Tamil which constructed Tamil people’s history through memories. What does the Sangam literature aspire to emphasize amongst Tamils who lived as various ethnic tribes in the widespread territory? There is so much to ponder upon.

Language and land are closely interrelated. The language binds man with land and society. Various kinds of landscape viz. *kuṟiñci*, *mullai*, *marudam*, *neydal* and *pālai* have been conceptualized in the memory of Tamils. It was a significant exercise in defining and demarcating the boundaries of an endless stretch of territory postulated by the human mind’s imagination. The Sangam poems have fulfilled the necessity of connecting the hill tribes who searched for food and hunted in the

mountains, the cattle keepers who grazed livestock in the forests, and the fisher folks who fished in the sea waters with nooses. The search for new land unfolds to highlight a new type of system that disrupts the customs, habits, traditions, manners, rituals, etc., of numerous tribes. The dual entities viz. *pōr* (battle) to conquer land in *puṛam* (exterior sphere) and *kādal* (the romantic love) to win a woman in *akam* (interior sphere) were designed into the same orderliness. *Pōr* is the carnival of the ethnic tribe society. Projection of *vīram* is fully male-centric. Conceptualisation about man's hallmarks such as relishing land in *puṛam* and enjoying a woman in *akam* was very finely expressed in Sangam texts.

The notion of a country having a particular language emerges when the prevailing language is intertwined with land. In the context of *arasu* (government), *adigāram* (power), *pōr*, *vīram*, etc., gaining dominance, a colossal territory is created at the expense of small regions. As a result, the *status quo* of an ethnic tribe's existence was disturbed and subsequently, *kuṛunila maṇṇargaḷ* (the chieftains/ lords of small regions) grew stronger. Inspirational efforts towards the political orientation of *mūvēṇḍar* (Three emperors – Cēra, Cōḷa and Pāṇḍiya kings) continued. Under the reigning of these *vēṇḍargaḷ*, political power swept over Tamil land. The formation of Tamil society's kingdom with certain notions got materialized due to the efforts of *pāṇar* (bards), who had roamed around Tamil lands humming and singing. Discourses of *pāṇar* justifying battles between kings and putting forth the trait *vīram* generated the mood for waging wars among people. The pursuits of *pāṇar* played a vital role in bringing together the varied small fragmented regions into a colossal territory. Poets' activities are distinctive in establishing the monarch based ruling authority by bringing together several ancient ethnic tribes viz. *vēḍar* (hunters), *āyar* (herdsmen), *kuṛavar* (hill tribe fowlers), *eyiṇar* (desert hunting tribes), *umaṇar* (salt-makers), *paravar* (fishermen), *pāṇar* (bards), *tuḍiyar* (drummers who beat *tuḍi*, a small drum shaped like an hourglass), *kūttar* (actors/dancers

of traditional theatre performance), *porunar* (a community of bards/valiant men), *paṛaiyar* (drummers), *kaḍambar* (unruly persons), *kiṇaiyar* (drummers who beat *kiṇaipparai*, a drum or tabor of the agricultural tract) and changing the topography of *malai* (mountain), *kāḍu* (forest), *kaḍarkarai* (seashore), *puravu* (pastoral land), etc., where they traditionally lived.

In *Puṛanāṇūru*, a text in Eight Anthologies, the terms such as *vēndaṇ*, *maṇṇaṇ*, *īrai*, *kāvalaṇ*, etc. were employed to refer to a ruler/king. The term *vēndaṇ* refers pertinently to *mūvēndaṇ*, *maṇṇaṇ* denotes a chieftain/a lord of small regions, and *īrai* and *kāvalaṇ* connote a chief of an ethnic tribe. If we analyse the facts carefully, except *vēndaṇ*, we can get details of development, vestiges, and makeovers of ancient Tamil ethnic tribes. Even most of the *kuṛunila maṇṇargaḷ* seemed to be less established ethnic leaders. In the Sangam poems, we found that the entire communal demeanour and collective activities were associated with ethnic tribes.

During the Sangam time, the influence of Vedic religion was spread among the *vēndaṇ*. Brahmins had a great deal of influence over society. However, the people who lived as ethnic tribes hailed their distinctive characteristics. A fundamental aspect of ethnic tribe's society was *uṇavup pangīḍu* (sharing of food). The people of ethnic tribes such as *vēḍar* (hunters) and *kuṛavar* (fowlers) had the habit of sharing food that was hunted and gathered collectively among themselves. The *vēḍar*, who used to collect food items by *vēṭṭai* (hunting), *ānirai kavardal* (cattle lifting) and *āralai kaḷavu* (desert-robbery), in due course of time became warriors for *vēndaṇ*. The administrative heads, who turned as *cīrūr maṇṇargaḷ* (chiefs of small towns), put forth the well-being of ethnic tribes' people. The people of the hunting tribe who lived in hillock regions, and the people of the semi-hunting community who sowed *tiṇai* (Foxtail millet), *varagu* (Kodo millet), etc., in forest regions became backdrop forces during the emergence of kings of mountain regions. *Kāṇakkurvargaḷ* (forest-dwelling fowlers) who sowed and grew millets in the designated area of the

mountain slope, the zone that was acquired for farming by burning the rough land, moved from place to place and engaged in hunting as a supplementary activity to farming. The people—who became heads of such mountain-dwelling tribes—ruled their respective regions independently.

With the utilization of irrigation facilities and by expanding the area of agriculture, production growth was accelerated in *marudam* (cultivable land) regions. The government which was formed to protect the well-being of those who pursued agriculture became strong under the leadership of *vēndar*. In order to protect the interests of these peasantry classes, the *vēndar* waged wars and usually defeated *kurunila manṇargal*, *iṇakkuḷut talaivargal* (chiefs of ethnic tribes), etc., and subsequently expanded territories of their kingdom. The Sangam poems projected a communal transformation by highlighting the essentials of leading a prosperous life, suggesting a scheme of actions to improve water resources to have high growth of land yielding.

Among the ancient tribes who led the *tiṇai* oriented life of the Sangam era, the *pāṇar* followed the practice of moving from one place to another. The *pāṇar* who moved from place to place were experts in the disciplines of *mandiram* (a form of exorcism), *kuṛi colludal* (astragalomancy/fortune-telling), *nimittam* (omen) and *maruttuvam* (medicine/treatment). They sang melodic songs by playing *yāl*, a stringed musical instrument. The bards who lead a communal life were addressed as *kūttar*, *viraliyar* (female dancers), *porunar*, *pāḍiṇiyar* (female singers), etc. There was a close connection between the *pāṇar* who belonged to an old oral lineage and sang *vallāṇ mullai* (position of the robust man) and heads of ethnic tribes. The minstrels addressed as *muduvāy pāṇar* (bards with ancient wisdom) played an important role in the ethnography of aboriginal people's life. The *pulavar marabu* (poets' lineage) seemed to have evolved from *pāṇar marabu* (bards' lineage) at the latter's advanced stage. The

poets depended heavily on *vēndar*. The *pāṇar*, an ever-wandering minstrel community, moving from place to place lost its credibility of oral lineage due to the prevailing political change of the day. With no support from any quarter, the bards became so poor that they had to starve for the next meal.

How did the *pāṇar* lineage alone obliterate, when the situation was such that the poets were dependent on *vēndar*?. This is worth examining. Because of the Vedic religion and conducting rituals, the Brahmins managed to get due influence over kings. Thereby the *muduvāyp pāṇargaḷ* were neglected. Due to the influence of the Vedic faith, the *pāṇar* lineage fell into place. One can draw the inference from the collapse of the communal life of ethnic tribes and ascendancy of feudal society that it was the economic reason that worked behind the exclusion of *tolpaḷaṅkuḍi* (the ancient aboriginal tribe) like *pāṇar* in Tamil land.

If we analyse the compositions of *pulavargaḷ* (poets) cumulatively, we can ascertain the details of *pāṇar* lineage then prevailed. The *pāṇar* who excelled in singing songs orally later became *pulavar* once they were literate. After the collapse of *tiṇaicār vāḷkkai* (landscape-oriented life) and the emergence of the prosperous monarchical state, the *pulavar* gained influence over *vēndar* when the situation demanded people to stay in one place, permanently. It is interesting to note that *pāṇar* and *pulavar* were in dire poor conditions to depend on administrative heads viz. *iṇakkuḷut talaivar*, *maṇṇar* and *vēndar*. The *mūvēndargaḷ* ruled over Tamil Nadu, a vast territory, without much problem, that too in the absence of a communication facility. It is a matter to be probed. *Vēndargaḷ* who ruled the vast territory with constant force were relatively powerful than *kuṟunila maṇṇargaḷ*. The *tolpaḷaṅkuḍiyiṇar* who led *tiṇaicār vāḷkkai* lived with their own distinctive identity under *iṇakkuḷut talaivan*. Hailing *kuḍi* (tribe) and *maṇṇadaḷai* (army) naturally led to repudiation against the authority of outsiders. The *magatpāl kāñci* (war ensuing from seeking a girl



in marriage) poems chronicled the context of someone refusing to give his girl to the bride seeker even if he was a *vēndaṇ*. Though a colossal catastrophe is at looming, such a refusal to the authority of *iṇakkulūt talaivaṇ* or *kurunila maṇṇaṇ* was associated with pride of ethnic tribe. The *vēndaṇ* attempting to marry a woman with the aim of expanding the territory under his control, in a way, led to the collapse of the ethnic tribes. As a result, the gap between *vēndaṇ* and *iṇakkulūt talaivaṇ* widened during the Sangam era. The virtue emphasized by the universal fame *puram* poem, beginning with the stanza, “*Yādum ūrē yāvarum kēlir*” (“Every town our home town”), (Kaṇiyaṇ Pūṇkuṇraṇ, PNU 192) favoured a mighty *vēndaṇ*. In *akattiṇai* poems where a woman is implicitly advised to accept the romantic love of a man hailing from a different tribe than hers, the politics of land expansion was entrenched. The Sangam poets’ attitude of not hailing or promoting the romantic love affair between a man and a woman, who belonged to the same ethnic tribe, needs to be understood in a comparative perspective.

The following *puram* poem shows how the difference between *vēndaṇ* and *kurunila maṇṇaṇ* existed during the Sangam era.

*vaḷinaḍan danṇa vāyccelal ivuḷiyōḍu*  
*koḍinuḍangu micaiya tēriṇar eṇāak*  
*kaḍalkaṇ ḍaṇṇa oṇpaḍait tāṇaiyōḍu*  
*malaimāru malaikkum kaḷirriṇar eṇāa*  
*urumurar raṇṇa uṭkuvaru muracamōḍu*  
*cerumēm paḍūum veṇriyar eṇāa*

*maṇkelu tāṇai oṇpūṇ vēndar*  
*veṇkuḍaic celvam viyattalō ilamē*  
*emmāl viyakkap paḍūu mōrē*

*iḍumuṭ paḍappai maṇimēyn doḷinda*  
*kurunaṇu muṇṇaik koḷuṇkaṇ kurraḍagu*  
*punpula varagiṇ coṇriyōḍu perūum*  
*cīrūr maṇṇar āyiṇum emvayin*  
*pāḍarindu oḷugum paṇpi ṇōrē*  
*migappēr evvam uriṇum eṇaittum*

*uṇarcci illōr uḍaimai uḷḷēm  
nallaṟi vuḍaiyōr nalguravu  
uḷḷudum perumayām uvaṇḍunaṇi peridē.  
(Puraṇāṇūru 197)*

We are not awed by kings with white umbrellas and wealth, donning bright ornaments, who have horses that leap like the rush of the wind, chariots with banners flying on the top, ocean-like huge armies with glowing weapons, warriors riding elephants that can attack mountains, drums that roar like thunder and armies which rule lands.

We are awed by the man who knows our nature and treats us well, even if he is the king of a small town which grows no more than millet in its dry fields surrounded by thorn fences, where young goats graze and reduce thick, fragrant leaves of *mugnai* greens which are eaten with grain meals.

Even if we suffer greatly, we do not desire the wealth of those who are not aware. We think of the poverty of those who are truly aware, O greatness, and we are very greatly happy!  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>1</sup>

The above quoted poem composed by Kōṇāṭṭu Ericcalūr Māḍalan Maduraik Kumaraṇār makes clearer the greatness of an ethnic community leader. “We, *pāṇar*, do not admire the wealth acquired from battles with the support of elephant corps, cavalry corps, chariot corps, infantry corps by *vēndar* and their victories. We highly hail the trait of *cīṟūr maṇṇaṇ*, even if he is the chief of a small town which grows no more than millet in its dry fields surrounded by thorn fences, where lambs graze and spit the small and fragrant leaves of *muṇṇaikkīrai* (a kind of spinach) which are eaten with grain meals, because he had befriended us, acknowledging our poetic skill”. These inputs are relatively significant to know the different traits of *vēndar*

and *cīrūr manṇar*. The poet Maduraik Kumaraṇār thus expressed his opinion by drawing inferences from his fellow poets: “It is better to think of the poverty of those who are truly aware of our worth than desiring for the wealth of affectionless people”. From this poem, we comprehend that there were different perceptions about kings and chiefs of small towns postulated by bards and poets. “The chief of the ethnic tribe is grander than *vēndaṇ*” – thus expressed opinion, no doubt, is politically oriented.

There are so many poems in *Puraṇāṇūru* which describe that *porumaṇ*, *tuḍiyaṇ*, *kiṇaivar* and others played their musical instruments viz. *tuḍi* (small leather drum) *taḍāri* (medium-sized leather drum), *kiṇaippaṇai* (large size leather drum), etc., in the courtyard of kings and glorified their traits. They received clothes, food, and alcoholic beverages from kings. The legacies of *pāṇargaḷ* and *pulavargaḷ* were admired and documented in Sangam classics.

There are 138 poems about *mūvēndaṇ*, 141 poems about forty eight *kurunila manṇar* and 121 poems by unknown poets about kings and lords of small regions. Poems on *kaḍaiyeḷu vaḷḷalgaḷ* (the last seven patrons) viz. Pāri, Ōri, Kāri, Pēgaṇ, Naḷḷi, Adiyamāṇ and Āy are notable. Of these, Adiyamāṇ in 23, Pāri in 17, Āy Aṇḍiraṇ in 16, Pēgaṇ and Kumaṇaṇ in 7, Kāri in 6, Nāñcil Vaḷḷuvaṇ and Piṭṭaṅkorraṇ in 5 and Eḷiṇi in 4 poems were mentioned with some remarkable details. This arithmetic points out the relationship that existed between *kurunila manṇargaḷ* and *pulavargaḷ*.

The following poem on one chief of an ethnic tribe, living a simple life by Madurai Kaḷḷiṇ Kaḍaiyattaṇ Veṇṇāgaṇār shows certain fascinating details.

*kaḷḷiṇ vāḷttik kaḷḷiṇ vāḷttik*  
*kāṭṭodu miḍainda cīyā muṇṇril*  
*nāṭcerukku aṇandart tuṇcu vōṇē*  
*avanem iraivaṇ yāmavaṇ pāṇar*  
*nerunai vanda virundiṇku marṇuttan*

*irumbuḍaip paḷavāl vaittanaṇ inrik*  
*karuṅkōṭṭuc cīriyāl paṇaiyam idukonḍu*  
*īvadi lālaṇ eṇṇādu nīyum*  
*vaḷḷi marungul vayangiḷai aṇiyak*  
*kaḷḷuḍaik kalattēm yāmagiḷ tūngac*  
*ceṇṇuvāy civandumēl varuga*  
*cīrukan yāṇai vēnduviḷu muravē.*  
*(Puranānūru 316)*

He praised liquor! He praised liquor!  
 He sleeps gladly on his unswept front  
 veranda in the morning, drunk, since he  
 beat his enemy king owning small-eyed  
 elephants in battle.  
 He is our king! We are his bards!

Yesterday, he pledged his ancient sword,  
 to give gifts to his guests. Black-stemmed  
*yāls* will be pledged by us today to prove  
 the truth. Do not think he will not give!  
 For us with liquor to be happy,  
 go with your wife with a waist like a vine,  
 and get bright jewels. Return with your  
 mouths reddened by drinking!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>2</sup>

“Soon after the death of the enemy king in battle, our lord is the man, who sleeps in the wee hours of the morning after drinking toddy in a dilapidated house. We are his *pāṇar* hailing his fame”. The leader greeted in the poem was none other than a chief of an ethnic tribe. “Yesterday he happily pledged his sword to help his *pāṇar*. The sleeping place of the valiant lord was resourceless. He was incapable of saving things in his hand”. The chief of the ethnic tribe thinks it is his duty to respect *pāṇar*. Hence, he comes forward to mortgage his iron sword. This is the honour only applicable to the chief of the ethnic tribe. By describing the activities of *pāṇar*, who went in search of the chief of an ethnic tribe, living in a forest surrounded by nature, the poem reflectively depicted the prevailing milieu of the past. On

seeing a champion adept in throwing arrows, the overwhelmed head of *pāṇar* says:

.....  
*pāḍuval viṛaliyōr vaṇṇam nīrum*  
*maṇmulā amaiyiṇ paṇyāl nīrumiṇ*  
*kaṇviḍu tūmbir kaḷirruyir toḍumiṇ*  
*ellari toḍumiṇ āguḷi toḍumiṇ*  
*padalai yorukaṇ paīyeṇa iyakkumiṇ*  
*madalai mākkōl kaivalam tamiṇenru*  
*iraivaṇ āgalir collubu kuṟugi*  
*mūvēḷ turaiyum muraīyulīk kaḷippik*  
*kōveṇap peyariya kālai āngadu*  
*taṇpeyar āgaliṇ nāṇi marruyām*  
 .....

(*Puranāṇūru* 152: 12-22)

I said, “Talented *viralis*, I will sing, you spread clay on *mulā* drum, pluck the strings of your tuned *yāzh*, play the *thoompū* that is hollow like an elephant’s trunk, and has holes, beat the *ellari* drum, strike the *ākuli* drum, softly hit the *pathalai* drum on its single eye, and place in my hand the black rod that foretells the future,” and I approached him. We sang twenty one themes of songs before him in the manner in which they should be sung, and addressed him as “King!” for which he was embarrassed since it was his title. (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>3</sup>

“I sing. You play musical instruments. Add more *cudi* (< *Sruti*. Skt., meaning pitch) by stringing a lute. Beat a big musical instrument. Beat a drum”, thus uttered the head of *pāṇar* who sang methodically the twenty-one types of songs. Then he hailed the *vēḍaṇ* (hunter) by addressing him as “*vēndē!*” (“Oh king”). Upon hearing the greeting word, the hunter instantly feels embarrassed; serves country liquor with deer meat; disappears into the wilderness after gifting him gold and sapphire. It is to be noted that in the ethnic tribal society where *vīram* and *vēṭṭaittiṇṇaṇ* (hunting prowess) were highly valued, the manner the *pāṇar* hailed the *vēḍaṇ* (hunter) through songs and

music was indeed a matter of acclaim. The bards who accidentally met the hunter on the way praise him for his arrow striking prowess. Thereupon, the embarrassed hunter, the leader of the ethnic tribe serves food, toddy and other worthy things to them. The above-mentioned poem illustrates the singing legacy of minstrels and the greatness of philanthropy of a leader of an ethnic tribe. It also portrays the situation of the bygone era where bards were supposed to be greeted with food, liquor, and valuable items.

The *vīram* was accorded with the prime position during the “Heroic Age” (c. 3000 BCE–CE 300), in which meat and alcohol were essential. Along with hunting, the lifting of cows was glorified as a heroic deed. The champion, who consumed toddy, exchanged the cow herd for the price of the beverage. Having drunk the sweet country liquor and ate soft meat food stomach full, he again went in search of the cowherd. A *Puranāṇūru* poem (258) describes a typical characteristic of the champion who frequently went to the toddy shop. The poet tells the shop owner that when the champion returns with a herd of cows to drink on credit, and his demand is not met, he would be angry. The poet who penned this poem was probably a bard. The dialogue of the drunkard who drank toddy along with the chief of an ethnic tribe illustrates the prevailing socio-milieu of the day. It was no wonder that such a hero was admired in the societal life of the ethnic tribes.

There existed a warm relationship between the kings of small regions/ chiefs of an ethnic tribe and poets. The attribute of the leader extolls the great qualities of poets. Even with inadequate resources, the leader’s interest in the bard never faded.

.....  
*uṇḍāyir padam koḍuttu*  
*illāyir uḍaṇ uṇṇum*  
*illōr okkal talaivaṇ*  
*aṇṇaḷem kōmāṇ vainnudi vēlē.*  
*(Puranāṇūru 95: 6-9)*

..... When he has  
 plenty, he gives food. Even when he does  
 not have enough, he shares and eats what  
 he has, our noble king, a leader to those who  
 do not have.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>4</sup>

The description about Adiyamāṇ Añci is fully pertinent to the chief of an ethnic tribe: “When he has adequate food and wealth, he shares them with others, when he does not have enough, then he shares whatever he has and eats with them”. The poetess Avvaiyār further adds:

*perumalai viḍaragat tarumicaik koṇḍa*  
*cīriyilai nellit tīṅkaṇi kuṟiyādu*  
*ādal niṇṇāgattu aḍakkic*  
*cādal nīṅga emakkīit taṇaiyē*  
 (Puranānūru 91: 8-11)

O Greatness! Without considering how difficult it was to get the sweet *nelli* fruit from a tree with small leaves, plucked from the crevices of an ancient lofty mountain that was difficult to scale, you gave it to me, knowing its benefits of removing death, which knowledge you kept within yourself!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the poetess clarifies her engrossment with Adiyamāṇ. As the poetess was very much attached to him, she was emotionally grieved on his death. Her bereavement poem came out as a highpoint poetic piece of grieving.

*cīriyakaḷ periṇē emakkīyum maṇṇē*  
*periyakaḷ periṇē*  
*yāmpāḍat tāṇmagiḷn duṇṇum maṇṇē*  
*cīrucōr rāṇum naṇipala kalattaṇ maṇṇē*  
*perumcōr rāṇum naṇipala kalattaṇ maṇṇē*  
*eṇboḍu taḍipaḍu vaḷiyellām emakkīyum maṇṇē*  
*amboḍu vēlnulāi vaḷiyellām tāṇirkum maṇṇē*  
*narandam nārum taṅkaiyāl*

*pulavunārum eṇṭalai taivarum manṇē*  
(*Puranānūru* 235: 1-9)

In the past, if he had a little toddy, he would give it to us.  
Not any longer. If he had abundant toddy, he would  
give it to us and happily drink the leftover as we sang to  
him. Not any longer. If he had a little rice, he would set  
it abundantly on many dishes. Not any longer. If he had  
heaps of rice, he would set it out abundantly on many dishes.  
Not any longer. Whenever he came upon bones full of meat,  
he would give it to us. Not any longer. Whenever arrows  
and lances crossed the battlefield, he stood there.  
Not any longer. With his hands with orange fragrance, he  
would stroke my hair with its stench of meat. Not any longer.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>6</sup>

“If he gets a lesser toddy, he would give it to us (the bards). If he gets more toddy, he would give it to others; he would drink with others and would ask the bard to sing. If he has less food, he would share it with many people. If he has more food, then he would share and eat it with others”. Thus, the poetess Avvaiyār glorifies the attributes of Adiyamāṇ. She laments further while thinking of him and says, “With his fragrant hands, he would stroke my hair with the stench of meat”. The relationship between Adiyamāṇ, the chief of the ethnic tribe, and Avvaiyār, the *pāḍiṇi* (songstress, a woman of *pāṇar* community) stands rock solid. The bond between the chief of the ethnic tribe and the poetess was likely to be sexual as the former had such a close relationship with the young lady that he would stroke her head. One can see their deep bond, in the lamentation of the poetess Avvaiyār, “*ācāgu endai yāṇḍulaṇ kollō*” (“Where is my lord who had been my support). She expressed her deep emotional bond over the lord through the term “*endai*” (my lord).

The poem authored by Ēṇiccēri Muḍamōciyār, praising Vēl Āy, the chief of an ethnic tribe, reveals valued qualities of *pāṇargaḷ*.

*īgai ariya ilaiyaṇi magaliroḍu*  
*cāyiṇ reṇba Āay kōyil*



*cuvaikkiṇi dāgiya kuyyudai aḍicil*  
*pirarkku iṇirit tamvayi rarutti*  
*uraicāl ōṅgupugal orūiya*  
*muraicukeḷu celvar nagarpō lādē*  
*(Puranāṇūru 127: 5-10)*

They say that Āy's women have only the precious gold  
 jewels that cannot be given away, and the palace has  
 fallen into disrepair. It cannot be compared to the palaces  
 of kings with drums who have lost their great fame,  
 who eat tasty, sweet foods with spices and fill their  
 stomachs, unable to give to others!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>7</sup>

“Since everything was given to *pāṇar*, the women were only left with the jewels that they were wearing at home. The palaces where kings with drums eat delicious food without offering it to others are not equal to Āy's palace which has fallen into disrepair”. Through this candid statement of the poet, one can realize what sort of close bond existed between kings of small regions and chiefs of the ethnic tribes.

As per the poet Marudaṇ Iḷanāgaṇār's utterance, Nāñcil Vaḷḷuvaṇ, the chief of an ethnic tribe, was a mighty warrior who took part in battles on behalf of one *vēndaṇ*. The poet had extolled the philanthropic nature of Nāñcil Vaḷḷuvaṇ who used to give so many things to bards. “Oh! Old bard with torn clothes, carrying your small *yāl* with a resounding voice! You have come here with desire. But your king will not ask you to come back later” (PNU 138). In such expression of the poet Marudaṇ Iḷanāgaṇār, we can see the benevolent approach of the chief of the ethnic tribe Nāñcil Vaḷḷuvaṇ towards the bards. Further, the poet expresses: “*Pāṇar* and *viṇaliyar* are awaiting gifts from you. There might be a huge battle and you might leave suddenly. If you do, my family in despair will be very sad. So, please remove the sorrow of my kinsfolk by gifting things to us” (PNU 139). In the poet's appeal, while the gallantry trait of the small region's king was emphasized, the pathetic poor condition of the bards was highlighted. These poems chronicled the reflective relationship that existed between the kings/

chieftains and the bards of the past where the latter were seeking gifts from the former as their right.

Even in the poor economic conditions, the *inaḱkuḷut talaivaṇ* has had the attribute of feeding *pāṇar* who came to him seeking things. This has been detailed in the following poem tagged as *mūdiṇ mullai* (the ancient warrior tribe):

*erudu kāḷurāadu ilaiṇar koṇra*  
*cilviḷai varagiṇ pullen kuppai*  
*toḍutta kaḍavarkkuk koḍutta miccil*  
*pacitta pāṇar uṇḍukaḍai tappaliṇ*  
*okkal oṟkam coliyat taṇṇūrc*  
*cirupul lāḷar mugattavai kūri*  
*varaguḍaṇ irakkum neḍuntagai*  
*arasuvariṇ tāngum vallā laṇṇē.*  
*(Puraṇāṇūru 327)*

After giving besieging creditors their due share, the noble man, who had the strength to repel kings, had a small heap of low-yielding millet, stomped by youngsters, without bulls touching them to thresh, that he gave to hungry bards.

Since nobody came to him thinking he did not have any leftover millet to give, he feared, and in order to remove the poverty of his relatives, he told petty-minded men what he needed, and borrowed millet from them.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>8</sup>

In the afore-mentioned poem, the infinitive term “*pacitta*” (to hunger) has been rendered as an adjective to the noun *pāṇar*. The amount of *varagu* (millet) with the chief of an ethnic tribe was so meagre which cannot dissolve the hunger of the starving bards. But he has a valuable trait of borrowing the grain from others to appease the hunger of guests/visitors. This state of attitude virtually belonged to the ethnic community/tribe.

Searching for food is a fundamental issue in the society of ethnic tribes. The requirements of bards were very minimal as they were hugely dependent on ethnic tribes. Naturally, the chief of the ethnic tribe appeases the hunger of the bards. They were wandering across Tamil Nadu territory by playing *yāl*. The bards naturally had the typical mindset, “*etticaic celiṇum atticaic cōrē*” (Avvaiyār, PNU 206) (“Whichever direction we go, there is rice everywhere”).

One bard dressed in torn garments was hungrily waiting under a jackfruit tree. He greeted a hunter who came there.

*tāṇṇeli tīyiṇ viraivaṇaṇ cuṭṭuniṇ*  
*irumpēr okkaloḍu tiṇmeṇat tarudaliṇ*  
*amiḷdiṇ micaindu kāypaci nīṅgi*  
 (Puranāṇūru 150: 12-14)

..... he kindled a fire where rapidly he  
 roasted bit pieces of fatty meat that looked like butter and gave  
 it all to me, and said, “Eat this, along with your large family.”  
 We ate it like it was divine nectar, and removed our extreme  
 hunger, .....  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>9</sup>

The action of the hunter, roasting a deer’s white fatty meat that looked like butter and giving it fully to the bard and saying, “Eat this, along with your kinsfolk” was a timely help extended to the hungry people. Furthermore, he gave a bright pearl necklace and a bracelet to the bard. After all these, the patron went to his hometown without telling his name, when the bard asked for the same. Through the utterances of others, the bard came to know that the patron was Kaṇḍīrak Kōpperunaḷli, the lord of a mountain region. The act of the ethnic tribe’s chief helping the bard without even mentioning his name is, indeed, the zenith of humanity.

A bard went to a lord’s hut in the evening, looking for him. But the lord was not at his hut. The lord’s wife appeases his hunger by providing roasted rabbit meat. The relationship that existed between the bard and the chief of the ethnic tribe and with his family was a remarkable one.

*pūval paḍuvil kūval toṇḍiya*  
*ceṇkaṇ ciṇṇīr peyda cīril*  
*muṇril irunda muduvāyc cāḍi*  
*yāṅah ḍuṇḍeṇa varidu māciṇru*  
*paḍalai muṇril ciṛutiṇai uṇangal*  
*puravum idalum aravum uṇgeṇap*  
*peydar kelliṇru poḷudē adaṇāl*  
*muyalcuṭṭa vāyiṇum taruguvēm pugutandu*  
*īṅirun dīmō muduvāyp pāṇa!*  
*(Puranānūru 319: 1-9)*

There is an old jar with flared mouth with a little water  
 at the bottom, in the front yard of our small house,  
 brought from the well dug in the red earth in the ravine.  
 It is good to drink. It is dark now to put out dried tiny  
 millet for the pigeons and quails, to take as bait.  
 So, we will feed you roasted hare meat.

Come and stay here, O bard with ancient wisdom.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>10</sup>

Besides feeding the bard who came in search of the ethnic tribe chief,  
 the wife of the chief says that the bard and his wife *pāḍiṇi* (songstress)  
 would get gold lotus from the lord. Such treatment extended to the  
 bard, an outsider, and the act of feeding him and his wife affectionately  
 like relatives was a typical character of the ethnic tribal society.

### Special Qualities of the Chief of an Ethnic Tribe

We learn about the vestiges of ethnic tribal life of ancient tradition  
 through *puram* poetry, through the ruling bureaucracy, known as  
*vēndargaḷ*. The chief of the ethnic tribe did not consider himself to  
 be superior to the community he belonged to but instead lived on par  
 with the ordinary people. Some accounts of then prevailing milieu  
 which gave priority to the life of communal living:

1. The chief of the ethnic tribe is a man of a simple life.
2. The chief sleeps in an unclean open courtyard.

3. A person who mingles and has a dialogue with bards.
4. A person who offers the open courtyard for bards to stay in his home.
5. A kind-hearted man who appeases the hunger of bards by feeding them with meat.
6. A chief who does not have adequate economic resources.
7. A chief who belonged to a small town/village where *varagu* (millet) grows.
8. A chief who pawns his sword to feed the bards who came to him seeking things.
9. A leader who takes part in the battles and helps *vēndaṇ*.
10. Even when the leader is not at home, his wife feeds the bards who came to their home.
11. A leader who is quite valiant than *vēndaṇ*.
12. A leader who hails the virtues of the ethnic tribal life.
13. Despite being the leader of the ethnic tribe, he does not exercise authority over those around him.
14. A leader who acts as a man of hospitality.
15. A man who feels happy by listening to the song of bards and desires to have their friendship.
16. Bards had a hassle-free friendship with the chief of the ethnic tribe.
17. Bards respected the chief of the ethnic tribe much more than the empowered *vēndaṇ*.

### **Special Aspects of the Relationship between the Chiefs of Ethnic Tribes and Bards**

Even though the *muduvāyp pāṇargaḷ* wandered here and there due to lack of labour, they lived their lives proudly. There wasn't any custom among the bards that forced/pushed/encouraged them to appreciate the lords for the sake of just seeking materialistic favours. The bards, who sang the praises of the lords of the ethnic tribe, deeply lamented their deaths, too.

The following bereavement poem authored by Kuḍavāyil Kīrattāṇār on the death of Ollaiyūrkiḷāṇ Magaṇṇ Peruṇcāttāṇ is the ultimate elegy composed in an utter mournful situation.

*ilaiyōr cūḍār vaḷaiyōr koyyār  
nalliyāl maruppiṇ mella vāṅgip  
pāṇaṇ cūḍāṇ pāḍiṇi aṇiyāl  
āṇmai tōṇra āḍavark kaḍanda  
valvēl cāttāṇ māynda piṇrai  
mullaiyum pūttiyoḍ ollaiyūr nāṭṭē?  
(Puraṇāṇūru 242)*

Young men do not wear them! Women wearing bangles do not pluck them! The bard does not bend gently with the stem of his *yāzh* to pluck them to wear! The singer does not adorn herself with them! O jasmine vine! Do you still bloom in Ollaiyur, after Sāthan with a strong spear, who prevailed over warriors with his manly strength, died?  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>11</sup>

“After the death of Cāttāṇ who had won several warriors in battle, people felt deep sorrow. Young men do not wear *mullai* (jasmine) flower; the women did not pluck the flower; *pāṇaṇ* does not wear the flowery; *pāḍiṇi* also does not wear a flower. There is tragedy everywhere. People are crippled by the tragedy caused by the death of an ethnic tribe’s chief. Under such circumstances, Oh *mullai* flower! You have blossomed in vain”. Thus, the poet stacked up his sadness on nature. Because of the demise of the ethnic tribe’s chief, the bard and his wife did not wear jasmine flowers on their heads. This explains the value of ethnic tribe’s chief in the society. The Sangam poems had very finely accounted for the decline of *pāṇar* legacy during the Sangam era itself which was then esteemed for having a countless *muduvāyp pāṇar*. Even after *vēndar* became more powerful as a result of societal changes that deepened the class differences, the people who lived *tiṇaicār vāḷkkai* (landscape-oriented life) lived with their distinctive identity. Ethnic tribe chiefs who valued the interests of

such people hailed the ancient legacy. In doing so, *pāṇar* and *pāḍiṇi* who moved from place to place playing *yāl* were welcomed in those days. Although the ethnic tribe chiefs lived an ordinary life, they had the attribute of supporting bards sincerely with commitment.

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### Notes

1. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
2. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
3. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
4. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
5. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
6. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
7. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
8. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
9. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
10. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
11. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>

## Religion of the Tamils of Sangam Era

Tamil scholars, in general, accept the view that the period of Sangam Literature, chronicling the life of ancient Tamils, lasted over four hundred years. When uneven divergent ethnic tribes and societal structures were prevalent in the widespread territory, Tamil identity unified people. On one hand, the hunting community was quite strong, and on the other hand, the people who lived under the chief of the ethnic tribe were economically resourceful. The power of newly emerged *vēndar* (kings) had become a cause for the emergence of a new form of politics. In the absence of transport and communication, vestiges of ethnic tribe's life were influential during the Sangam period. In the said period, when people were leading *tiṇaicār vāḷkkai* (landscape-oriented life), development on the economic front took place due to the activities of farming by burning forests and rearing livestock. As a result of obliterating the distinctive societal structures of divergent ethnic tribes, people started to rule over nature. The supernatural powers of nature then became incomprehensible challenges to people. In such a vexed situation where people were struggling with the colossal power of nature on one hand and death on the other, realization over God must have come forth as they tried to calm down the supernatural powers by doing something or other. The human beings, who desired to understand the relationship between nature and themselves, found that some mystic



power was driving everything. *Mandiram* (a mystical verse) and *caḍanguḷ* (rituals) surfaced when they believed they could interact with nature through exorcist activities. It was believed that by offering animal sacrifice in worship, the supernatural spirits could be calmed down. That is how the idea of Godhead seems to have evolved. This was the backdrop on which the religion of Sangam Tamils emerged. The Sangam Tamils' ideology on religion is multi-dimensional.

During the Sangam era, people indulged in efforts to protect themselves from the wild floods, storms, rains and earthquakes on one hand and constantly struggled to save their lives from the deadly predators, on the other. As their knowledge developed to alienate themselves from nature, there emerged a situation to worship nature considering it as God. This is why the people of the Sangam era who lived dependently on the regions of *malai* (mountain), *kaḍal* (sea), *kāḍu* (forest) and *nīrnilaigal* (water bodies) in the five-fold landscapes believed that some invisible forces were dwelling in trees, hilltops, mountain springs, seashore, uninhabited forest, night and such things. They believed that by worshipping them, they would be free from the domination of evil spirits. The belief in the God of Sangam Tamils is full of facets of ancient aboriginal religion. The aboriginals did not give importance to exaggerated philosophy on human existence, extreme miracles' myths, legends on heaven/hell, and deities in the image. This sort of propensity had privileged in the Sangam Tamils' conceptualization of God.

The idea of God, in the beginning, was referred to as a formless superpower. During the Sangam period, a strong belief prevailed among the people that gods such as *sūr* (a malignant demon), *anangu* (harmful mountain deity/devil), *sūli* (Goddess Durga) and *Murugu* (Lord Muruga) were dwelling in the sites associated with nature. The mighty mystic powers viz. *anangu*, *varaiyara magalir* (goddesses dwelling in mountains) and *sūr* were considered as troubling deities, particularly by possessing women, weakening their bodies and hurting them. Though these deities were referred to by the names of *anangu*,

ghost and *sūr*, in the sense of connoting fear and distress, yet they were worshipped for their immense mystic powers. The Sangam poems candidly illustrate and endorse the very idea of ancient religion that fear is the root cause for the conceptualization of God. It is the idea of destructive forces rather than that of favourable ones that first prompted the man to conduct rituals. “It is only due to some or other evil force that the tribulations occur”. This belief was the foundation on which the Sangam Tamils’ religion built up. The following are the stanzas that express the troubling nature of *anangu*:

*kaṇḍārkkut tākkanangu ikkkārigai kāṇmin*  
(*Paripādal* 11: 122)

Look at the pretty woman who is an attacking deity to  
those who see her  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>1</sup>

*tākkaṇangu āvadu evaṇkol aṇṇāy*  
(*Aiṅkurunūru* 23: 4)

Now he’s like an attacking deity.  
Why has he changed, my friend?  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>2</sup>

The deity namely *tākkaṇangu* (attacking deity) will attack those who come in front of it. Particularly it would possess and trouble young women. When a woman detaches herself from the natural environs, identifies her existence and imagines a mystic power as *anangu*, the fear over the deity automatically evolves.

*Sūr* is another deity akin to *anangu* which instils fear among people. Commonly, it troubled those who walk in the mountains. The *sūr* is otherwise known as *sūrmagaḷ* (female fiend). It dwelled in the sites such as *malaiccuṇai* (mountain spring), *malaittoḍar* (mountain ghats) and *malai* (mountain/hill) where people are rarely seen. The deity would harm if one touches or wilt the sprouts that shot on the mountain/hill. Hence, even *varaiyāḍugaḷ* (nilgiri tahrs/rock-goats) get away without eating those sprouts.

*vāḍal kollō tāmē avaṇmalaip  
pōruḍai varuḍaiyum pāyā  
sūruḍai aḍukkatta koyarkarum taḷaiyē?*  
(*Narṇinai* 359)

The leaves which are difficult to pluck are from  
the mountains with deities, where even fighting  
mountain goats are unable to leap around.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>3</sup>

A stanza (169) in *Kuṛiṇcippāṭṭu*, “*sūruṇ mañṇaiyiṇ naḍunga*” (“Trembled with fear like peacocks possessed by fierce gods”) reveals how even birds possessed by the deity *sūr* were trembling. It is because of fear that the mountain, a natural location, became an abandoned place, as it was believed to be a place where the deity *sūr* existed. This is, in a way, a construct of ancient religiosity.

A lot of references about the fierce deities viz. *pēy* (ghost), *kaḷudu* (demon) of the battlefield are found in Sangam classics. The eyes of a ghost are alike *muracam* (large drum). Its red tongue is alike an upward flaming fire; teeth are alike elephant’s foot nails; splintered feet are like forks of a tree. Such descriptions, even in imagination, can terrify anyone. A practice of sacrificing a goat by slitting its neck existed to appease the ghosts. The cult emancipated by the belief over ghosts was nothing but an upshot of religiosity. In a way, it is ironic that the ghosts, considered to be a detrimental force to humanity during the Sangam era, continue to fear Tamils till date.

The belief that the deities are dwelling in all the mountains has a connection with nature. The phrases such as “*aṇanguḍai neḍuvarai*” (“tall mountains holding a fierce deity”), (*ANU* 22), “*aṇanguḍai varaippu*” (“mountains holding a fierce deity”), (*Ibid.*, 372), “*aṇangoḍu niṇradu malai*” (“the mountain had a fierce deity”), (*NRI* 165) refer to the deity dwelling in the mountain. They were believed to be protecting the mountains. Such guarding deities were very powerful; they have the nature of harming people; *varaiyara magalir*, the mountain-dwelling women deities, by staying in flowers afflicted

with fear on those people who saw them. “The deities dwelling in the mountain caves are hiding from the eyes of passer-by” (*ANU* 342). Along with their kinsfolk, hill tribes worship the deities that reside in the mountains by ritually offering food to them. Ritualistically they offer ripe mangoes, jackfruits, honey and toddy produced from bamboos to the deities and become intoxicated by consuming these items.

*tēntēr cuvaiya tiraḷarai māattuk  
kōḍaik kūḷtta kamaḷṇarun tīṇkaṇi  
payirppurap palaviṇ edircuḷai aḷaii  
irāloḍu kalanda vaṇḍumūcu ariyal  
neḍuṇkaṇ āḍamaip paḷunik kaḍuntīral  
pāppuk kaḍuppanṇa tōppi vāṇkōḷtu  
kaḍavuḷ ōṅguvaraik kōkkik kuṛavar  
murittalāi magalir maḍuppa māṇḍi  
aḍukkal ēṇal irumpuṇam maṇḍulī  
(Akanāṇūru 348).*

Where

honey-sweet, ripe summer mangoes, growing  
in the front yards of houses on trees with thick  
trunks, are mixed with fragrant, sweet, similar  
segments of sticky jackfruits and honey,  
and aged in long sections of swaying bamboo  
to become bee-swarmed liquor, as potent as  
harsh snakes, and women wearing tender leaf  
clothing offer it to the gods and then feed their  
men who forget to protect their large millet fields  
in the mountain, where elephants enter and steal,  
and angry young and old along with their relatives  
roam with their bows, looking for elephants?  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>4</sup>

The scene describes how *kuṛavar* (mountaineers) along with their wives worshipped the deity dwelling in the mountain.

We comprehend from Nakkīrar words, “*kāḍum kāvum kaviṇperu turuttiyum*” (“Forest and groves and beautiful islands”),

(*Tirumurugārruppaḍai*, Line 223) that people worshipped groves which were full of trees, plants and creepers as they believed the deity dwelled in them. The idea that deity existed at the base of big trees is presented in Sangam poems: “*Deyvam cērnda parārai vēmbil*” (“Thick-trunked neem tree with god”), (*ANU* 309: 4), “*kaḍavuḷ maratta muḷmiḍai kuḍambai*” (“Tree with deity nest made with thorns”), (*Ibid.*, 270: 12). Since the idea of the deities existing in the trees, such as *paṇai* (Palmyra tree), *vēmbu* (Neem tree), *ālamaram* (Banyan tree), *marāmaram* (Mangrove tree), *vēngai* (Kino tree), *vāgai* (Siris/Koko tree), *marudu* (Arjun tree) and *ōmai* (Elephant apple tree), terrified people, they were worshipped with huge floral garlands. People sacrificed animals/birds and prayed to these deities to save them from calamities. There was an Ash tree, a sacrificial altar and a pillar inscribed with the name of the deity in the public place where village people met and discussed various issues. If they moved to another village because of not being able to sacrifice animals/birds to these deities, it was believed that the gods were also on the move along with them. The belief, “Petrifying gods do dwell in trees”, in a way, has a connection with primitive religiosity.

It was believed in the past that god dwelled in water bodies viz. *āru* (river), *kuḷam* (pond), *kaḍal* (sea), *kaḷimugam* (river-mouth/backwater) and *tiṭṭu*, a raised ground in the middle of the river. There was a practice of worshipping the deities in the Sangam era. The stanzas, “*tuṛai evaṇ anangum*” (“the seashore agonizes us”), (*Aiṅkurunūru* (*AKU*) 53: 1), “*aruntīral kaḍavuḷ allan / peruntūraik kaṇḍu anangiyōlē*” (“He is not a god with rare abilities, he was in anguish when he saw her at the big shore”), (*Ibid.*, 182: 3-4) refer to the gods dwelling in water bodies that trouble women. The term *sūr* rendered in the phrase *sūrccuṇai* (fierce spring), (*ANU* 91: 4) connotes the female fiend. The gods denoted in the following stanzas, “*ananguḍai munnīr*” (“The ocean that has fierce deity”), (*Ibid.*, 207: 1), “*perunkaḍar parappiṇ amarndurai anangō*” (“Are you the goddess of the wide ocean with clear waves?”), (*NRI* 155: 6),

“*kaḍalkelu selvi*” (ocean goddess), (*ANU* 370: 12) conspicuously refer to the deity connected with the sea. Because of the dread caused by its huge water body, the gigantic ocean became a god to be worshipped.

The mountainous god *Murugu* was considered to be slightly different from the fierce gods. This god was referred to by names such as *Murugaṇ*, *Neḍuvēḷ* and *Cēy*. The *kunrak kuṛavargaḷ* (mountain-dwellers) who lived in mountains by cultivating cereals such as *aivaṇam* (mountain paddy) and *tiṇai* (millet) on mountain slopes worshipped the deity *Murugu* who dwelled in the mountains. In the prevailing *vēlaṇ veriyāḍal* (orgiastic dance possessed by a spirit) performance, water mixed with red millet was sprinkled over the ground where the ritual to drive the spirit *Murugu* away from a young woman, was conducted in the primitive time. The blood of sheep and *kuṇṇittinai* (a variety of millet) were used to heal the woman who was possessed by *Murugu*. The *vēlaṇ veriyāḍal* ritual of pacifying the woman possessed by *Murugaṇ* is related to the primitive religiosity. *Murugu* later referred to as *Murugaṇ*, became the God of virtues for the people. In addition to this, the deity turned into a benevolent god accomplishing favours for people. The god dwelling in the mountain is worshipped by the people till date.

If we examine the supernatural mystic powers viz. *sūr*, *anangu*, *sūli*, *Murugu* and *pēy* (ghost) referred to in the Sangam poems, we can understand that they have evolved largely out of fear of nature. Worshipping these mystic powers that cause terror, with an understanding that one could be free from their attacks, is the starting point of the custom of Sangam religion. It is interesting to note that the fallacies of the celestial deities did not penetrate much in ancient Tamils' life.

The human mind, having witnessed the natural occurrence of death, worried due to its inability to escape it. Upon knowing that death was inevitable, the mind blamed it as *kūrruvaṇ*, *kūrru* and *kālaṇ*, the terms connoting the “God of Death”. The following are the stanzas about the God of Death who mercilessly took the lives of human beings:

*ventīral kūrram*  
 (the mighty force Death)  
 (*Puranāṇūru* 238: 10)

*āruyirukku alamarum ārākkūrram*  
 (O Death! You roam around for lives,  
 .....  
 you who is never sated!)  
 (*Puranāṇūru* 361: 2)

*uyir uṇṇum kūrru*  
 (Death that eats lives)  
 (*Puranāṇūru* 4: 12)

*marundil kūrrattu aruntoḷil*  
 (medicine-less difficult work of Death)  
 (*Puranāṇūru* 3: 12)

Knowing that *pēy*, which is like the dreaded *anangu*, is not *kūrruvaṇ* (God of Death), the Tamils of the Sangam era did not construct a stupendous mythification about human existence after the death. This trend, in a sense, has a connection with the primitive religion.

The *naḍukal valīpāḍu* (Tombstone/Memorial stone worship) is the cult associated with the notion of *vīram* (valour) which is greatly valued in an ethnic tribal community. *Naḍukargaḷ* (the memorial stones) were planted along the road for the chivalrous warriors who died in the battles of either *ānirai kavardal* (cattle-lifting) or *ānirai mīṭṭal* (cattle-retrieving). Names of dead warriors and their brave acts were engraved on them. A lot of facts about the *naḍukal* cult are shown in the Sangam poems which describe the hunting community.

*pīli cūṭṭiya pīrangunilai naḍukal*  
*vēlūṇṇu palagai vērrumuṇai naḍukkum*  
 (*Akanāṇūru* 67: 10-11)

..... on the long paths that appear  
 like battlefields, there are flourishing memorial  
 stones with names and deeds etched, decorated  
 with peacock feathers, .....  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>5</sup>

*naḍukal pīli cūṭṭi nārari*  
*cirukalat tuguppavum koḻvaṇ kollō?*  
 (Puranānūru 232: 3-4)

His memorial stone is adorned with peacock  
 feathers and filtered toddy is poured on it.  
 Will he accept them, .....?  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>6</sup>

*vallāṇ padukkaik kaḍavuḷ pēṇmār*  
*naḍukal pīli cūṭṭi tuḍippaḍuttu*  
*tōppik kaḷḷoḍu turūuppali koḍukkum*  
 (Akanānūru 35: 7-8)

The shallow graves are worshipped, memorial  
 stones are decorated with peacock feathers, rice  
 wine is poured, sheep are given as offering and  
*thudi* drums are beat.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>7</sup>

*eḷuttuḍai naḍukal*  
 (memorial stone with script)  
 (Akanānūru 53: 11)

During the Sangam era, it was a prevailing custom to worship the erected stones in memory of the warriors. The process of worshipping the memorial stone involved washing the planted stones with fresh waters, applying turmeric paste over their surface, adoring peacock feathers and flower garlands, offering toddy, showing the smoke of the incense and offering the blood of sheep in sacrifice. In due course of time, there emerged a belief that God dwells within the stone that was planted in the earth to commemorate the heroic deed. Such erected stone cult later became the basis for the emergence of *kula deyvam* (tutelary deity). It was this gross form of the planted stone that became the foremost backdrop for the emergence of idol form worship in Tamil territory.

In the state of believing the natural entities as Gods, the change has taken place through the erected stone. Such was the cult associated



with primitive religion in the ethnic tribal community, where *vīram* was the primary concern, that the man who had a heroic death was worshipped as a god.

The cult of invoking or sacrificing animals to supernatural powers for health, well-being, yield, rain, hunting, etc., is remarkable in the Sangam religious tradition. The religious tradition of worshipping trees, water bodies, mountains, groves, planted stones, etc., continues in Tamils' life till date.

Vedic religious ideas, mythologies and deities, which originated in North India after the 6th century BCE, were introduced in Tamil by poets. The virtues and thoughts put forth by the heterodox religions viz. Buddhism and Jainism, which opposed the Vedic religion and its ideas, caused a significant impact on the people. It may be assumed that there prevailed a social milieu during the Sangam era that dominated the Vedic and heterodox religions' thoughts among the upper-class people. During the Sangam era of the Heroic Age, a belief existed that the man who had heroically died for the well-being of his ethnic community, would go to the celestials' world and have pleasure. Based on this notion, the Vedic religious concepts regarding the concepts of birth, rebirth, seven births, heaven-hell, etc., became popular among the rulers in Tamil Nadu. Particularly in the countries where *vēndar* reigned, the kindling of sacrificial fire for *yāgam* (*yagñā*) by Brahmins, recitation of Vedic *mantras*, the bestowment of charitable gifts to *andaṇar* (Brahmins), etc., were revered. The Veda has been mentioned in the Sangam literature as *arumaṇai* (sacred Vedas), *nāṇmaṇai* (four Vedas), and *nāl vēdam* (four Vedas). The Brahmins who recited the Vedas were known as *nāṇmaṇaip pulavar* (composers of four Vedas), *nāṇmaṇai mudalvar* (supremos of four Vedas) and *maṇaikāppālar* (guardians of Vedas).

*naṇpanuval nālvēdattu*  
*aruñcīrttip peruṇkaṇṇuṇai*  
*neymmali āvudi pongarp paṇmāṇ*

*vīyāc cīrappiṇ vēlvi murri*  
*yūbam naṭṭa viyaṅkaḷam palakol*  
 (Puranāṇūru 15: 17-21)

the number of huge fields where you have planted columns  
 after performing faultless rituals prescribed by the four good  
 Vedas, with precious sacrificial elements and abundant ghee?  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>8</sup>

Through the above-mentioned stanzas of a *puṇam* poem, referring to the conducting of a great number of *yagñas* through the four Vedas, we understand that the thoughts of Vedic religion spread during the Sangam period.

The details pertaining to the deities found in the Sangam poems that came through mythologies are considered as a continuum of Vedic religion. Indra, the chief of celestials, is referred to as *amarar selvaṇ* (son of celestials), *āyiram kaṅgaḷ uḍaiyōṇ* (holder of one thousand eyes), *turakkattu amarar selvaṇ* (son of celestials of heaven), the conqueror of enemies who emerged by conducting of one hundred *yagñas*. The festival celebrated in honour of Indra was known as Indra carnival.

*indra viḷaviṇ pūviṇ aṇṇa*  
*puntalaip pēḍai variniḷal agavum*  
 (Aīṅkuruṇūru 62: 1-2)

..... where a peahen  
 with its head looking like  
 the flowers of Inthira festival,  
 calls her mate from a strip of shade  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>9</sup>

Flowers were used abundantly during the Indra Festival. Although the information about Indra and the Devas are found in the Sangam literature, their place in the cult status is worth exploring.

The Viṣṇu worship known as *Tirumāl valipāḍu* was prevalent during the Sangam era. *Māl*, the god of *āyar* (herdsmen) who lived in the

forest and its adjoining regions, was addressed as *Māyōṇ*. Reference about *Māl*'s body is seen in the Sangam literature. It is mentioned that *Tirumāl* possesses the divine body which glitters like *nīlamaṇi* (blue sapphire), *kariya malar* (black flower), *kārmēgam* (black cloud), *kāriruḷ* (thick darkness) and *kaḍal* (sea). The image which is constructed through the stories of the supreme wonders committed by *Tirumāl* is associated with religious belief. The mythologies pertaining to *Tirumagaḷ* (Goddess Lakshmi), *Ādiseshan* (a mythological thousand-headed serpent), *Nilamagaḷ* (Goddess of Earth), *Garudan* (Eagle, the vehicle of Viṣṇu), *Nāṇmugaṇ* (Brahma), *kāmaṇ* (*Kāmdēv*, the God of Love)—the deities related to *Tirumāl*, are significant in the cult of Vaishṇavism. The legends that illustrate the incarnations of *Tirumāl* are exceptional in the construction of religion. The details of *Tirumāl* presented in *Paripāḍal*, a text in *Eṭṭuttogai* (Eight Anthologies), showed a remarkable growth of Vaishṇavism in the Sangam age.

In *Tirumurugārṛuppaḍai* (*TMA*), a book in *Pattuppāṭṭu* Anthology, details about the deity known as *mukkaṇṇaṇ* (Three-eyed God Śiva), who kept His consort Umādevi as a part of His body and showed His divine appearance in mount *kailāsh*. It is said in a *Puṛaṇāṇūru* poem that the Vedas were born from the speech of Lord Śiva (*PNU* 166: 2) who is referred to as *ālar selvaṇ* (*Cīrupāṇārṛuppaḍai*, Line 97), *ālkeḷu kaḍavuḷ* (*TMA*, Line 256), meaning, “the God who sits under the Banyan tree”.

*jñālam nārum nalamkeḷu nallisai*  
*nāṇmaṛai mudunūl mukkaṇ selvaṇ*  
 (*Akaṇāṇūru* 181: 15-16)

..... Śivan  
 with three eyes who gave the ancient four Vedas  
 that are famous all over the world  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>10</sup>

Through the Vedas, the name of the three-eyed God Śiva is spread all over the world and He shines with renowned fame. Myths about Śiva are widely found in the Sangam poems.

While the impact of Vedic religion was widespread during the Sangam period, it did not become the religion of most Tamils. The Vedic religion that flourished under the patronage of *vēndar* justified the socio-economic disparity that existed among the people. The slave bodies needed for the rule of *vēndaṇ*, the Vedic religious ideas have been of great use in constructing the myth of heaven in the next birth.

In the Sangam period, the tenets of Buddhism and Jainism spread through the monastery among the downtrodden people of Tamil Nadu. When the Vedas and *yagñā mantras* were uttered in the Sanskrit language, Buddhist and Jaina philosophies were put forward to people through translations in Tamil. This had become the cause for their wide reach among Tamils.

*pagatṭeruttiṇ palasālait*  
*tavappaḷḷit tāḷkāviṇ*  
*aviraṣṭai muṇivar angi vēṭkum*  
*āvudi narumpugai ..... ..*  
*(Paṭṭiṇappālai, Lines 52-55)*

There are many stables with strong  
 bulls in the front yards with ponds  
 with cold water.

There are monasteries and ritual grounds  
 in dense groves where sages with long,  
 bright hair perform rituals.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>11</sup>

The term *tavappaḷḷi* referred to here is the Buddhist place of worship, i.e. the monastery. *Maduraikkāñci*, a book in *Pattuppāṭṭu* (Ten Anthologies), mentions that women along with their children went to such monasteries for worshipping. The *arugaṇ kōvil* (Arhat temple) of the Jains was also in Madurai. The Jains who turned householders came over there and worshipped their God *Arhat* with flower and smoke of scent. The Jaina and Buddhist religious thoughts featured in the Sangam poems serve as backdrops to the emerging power politics.

If we examine the compiled poems of Sangam anthologies, it is evident that the Vedic religious ideas were accepted by Sangam poets and they were introduced and popularized by them through poems. At the same time, the Sangam poems documented the distinctiveness and influence of ancient Tamils' primitive religion over people, as their religiosity gave importance to nature. The Sangam Tamils' period was the era holding disparaged societal structure with political and economic differences. Hence, we are unable to comprehend the religion that projects a singular god or deity with homogenous characteristics. The Sangam poems have revealed the asymmetrical prevalence of faiths such as primitive religion, Vedic religion, Buddhism and Jainism in Tamils' life. While the vestiges of ethnic tribe's life were much in vogue during the Sangam era, Tamils' religion largely remained with the characteristics of primitive religion.

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### Notes

1. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/kali-pal/>
2. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-ainkurunuru/>
3. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/natrinai-2-2/>
4. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-301-400/>
5. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-1-100/>
6. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
7. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-1-100/>
8. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
9. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-ainkurunuru/>
10. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-121-300/>
11. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-pattinappalai/>

## Voices of Sangam Woman Poets in Puṛam Poetry

It is a widely accepted notion that the Sangam literature serves as the backdrop to understand the life of ancient Tamils who lived around 300 BCE and 200 CE. By identifying the Tamil language with the widened territory, the frequented space of Sangam Tamils was demarcated. The language identity called “Tamil” integrated people who had scattered as several divergent ethnic tribes and communities in the vast land. Someone progressing from *inakkulut talaivaṇ* (a chief of an ethnic tribe) to *kurunila maṇṇaṇ* (a chieftain/ lord of a small region) and then to *vēndaṇ* (king/emperor), the process of ascendance to sovereign power was associated with the absolute political authoritarianism. The problems that arose while annexing the conquered land by the victorious king with the territory of his country are well documented in the *puṛam* poems.

Only a man had the privilege in a society to be labelled with the categories viz. *kuḍi* (family/clan/tribe), *gaṇam* (class) and *maṇṇadaṭai* (army). Winning women by romantic love in the “interior life” and conquering land by war in the “exterior life” were contrived as the hallmarks of man. Violence seized the territory of other ethnic tribes/ communities and male dominance accelerated social development. While the land conquered by war becomes the relishing entity for a man in the exterior domain, the woman’s body becomes the grazing

field in the interior domain. The Sangam literary texts very finely established the conceptualisation that “the land and woman were the subjects under the control of man”.

During the Sangam era, the feudal society was rising. Some ethnic tribes had shifted from the state of collective hunting for food. People’s agricultural lifestyle was transformed due to forest burning and cattle rearing. There emerged a new political situation wherein people exercised individual rights over land and its surplus income. On one hand, as the kinship of ethnic tribal society disintegrated and transformed into class societal kinship, the system of monarchy that bestows sovereign reigning authority to a man by his birth was strengthened. On the other, by destroying the peculiar characteristics of the various ethnic tribal societies by battles, there prevailed possibilities for the emergence of empires.

The woman’s place is first and foremost in the edifice of the social institution called “family”. The family ideologically rules over the society even after being the smallest unit in a society centred around women. In order to produce the heir to the wealth/property of a man and to protect the social system of an ethnic community, a notion about a woman’s body being chaste was constantly stressed. In the social system where everyone is generally rejoicing his/her *kudipperumai* (pride of family), it is obligatory not to forget how a woman gives more importance to her in-law’s family than her kinsfolk. The social milieu of the day strongly tried to draw the woman into the establishment called “family” and demarcate every activity of hers. The mythification of chastity, waiting patiently for the departed husband to return, etc., do emphasize the new trend.

The Sangam literary texts have subtly attempted to distort the woman’s personal feelings, liking-disliking, sexual desire, etc., and tried to transform her as a mere body fittingly to the absolute dominance of man. The notion that tags *Puranānūru* as the text-embodiment of the ancient Tamils’ valour is associated with micropolitics. “In the patron-poet relationship, the Sangam *puṇam* poems which praise the

valour of kings belonged to the Heroic Age”. This conception put forth by Kailasapathy is acceptable. The *puram* poems which project waging war, drinking toddy and consuming mutton to a high point have largely been centred on the valour of man. In this context, we need to find out the position of women, especially in the milieu where they were confined to stay at home only.

The woman’s physical body is closely related to nature. Being a mammal, the woman who naturally loves her children is capable of forming a community around herself over a period of time. For the woman, violence is unwarranted. Once fully grown-up, the man tries to leave his ethnic community and establish his own place. The grown-up boy, having separated from his mother, tries to ruin the people of opponent community to empower himself through war. The position of woman in the bygone society was merely a substitution in the newly constructed discourse wherein the *vīram* (chivalry) and *maṛam* (bravery) were stated as the ultimate characteristics of man. In the functioning of societal existence, efforts of relegating the physical body of a woman to secondary status have continued. “The woman becomes completely matured from the day she attains puberty”. Such a notion is expressed in the Sangam literary texts. *Not even a brief mention of the girl-child is found in the Sangam literature.* The situation was created to bring a woman fully under the authority of a man, by controlling her independent capability and being dependent on the latter. The effect of male chauvinistic custom, whereby the wealth of man shall pass on to the son by heredity, determined the status of the woman.

In the historical milieu where the war became the complete domain of male, *Purāṇāṇūru* depicted that it is the foremost duty of women to give birth to male children for protecting people of their society as well as to take part in battles for the well-being of *kurunila maṇṇar*. Even if her son dies on the battlefield, feeling proud for such deaths was considered a matter of honour and a special characteristic of the heroic mother.



*mīṇuṇ kokkiṇ tūvi aṇṇa*  
*vāṇaraik kūṇḍal mudiyōḷ ciṟuvaṇ*  
*kaḷirerindu paṭṭaṇaṇ eṇṇum uvagai*  
*īṇra jñāṇṇiṇum peridē kaṇṇīr*  
*nōṇkaḷai tuyalvarum vedirattu*  
*vāṇpeyat tūṅgiya cidariṇum palavē.*  
*(Puranāṇūru 277)*

When the old woman with white hair,  
 like the feathers of fish-eating storks,  
 heard that her son was killed slaying an  
 elephant, she felt more joy than on the  
 day when she gave birth to him.

Her tears were more than the drops of  
 water, that hang on the sturdy, swaying  
 bamboos after the rain and drop.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>1</sup>

Thus the poetess Pūṇkaṇ Uttiraiyār constructed rhetoric over *vīram*, the heroic trait in the above-mentioned poem. A bereaved grey-haired mother, upon hearing that her youngest son had slain the elephant in battle and subsequently died, felt more delighted than the day she gave birth to him and shed tears of joy. In this poem, the political relationship of the young man is placed more prominently than the umbilical blood relationship of the mother and son. Through the poem, a lesson is imparted to society that the mother should rejoice over the heroic death of the son rather than lamenting his death.

The poem by Okkūr Mācāttiyār, beginning with the stanza, “*keḍuga cindai kaḍidival tuṇivē*” (“May her thoughts be ruined! Her will is strong”), (PNU 279) has constructed a new image of a mother. A woman accomplishes the status of “*mūḍiṇ magaḷir*” (the women from the ancient line) when she conducts herself living for her community/society without worrying about the loss of her men in the battle. “Her father killed an elephant day before yesterday and then fell on the battlefield. Yesterday, her husband drove back rows of warriors who came for cattle and was killed in battle. Today, when she heard the

roaring sound of the battle drums, desire rose in her. Overwhelmed, she who had nobody other than her only young son, placed a spear in his hands, smeared oil in his dry tuft, covered with white cloth, and bade him to march toward the battlefield” (PNU 279, Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert).<sup>2</sup>

Having pleased so much over the heroic death of her son, who valiantly fought and slew the mighty elephant before his death on the battle field, the mother felt more happier than the time she gave birth to him and shed tears of joy. We could realize the operation of micro-politics here in the following message that “Not the loss of her son in the battlefield, but it is his chivalrous act that gives the sense of pride to the bereaved mother.”

*narambeḷun dulaṛiya niraṃbā mentōḷ  
muḷari maruṅiṇ mudiyōḷ ciṛuvaṇ  
paḍaiyaḷindu māṛiṇaṇ enṛupalar kūṛa  
maṇḍamark kuḍaindaṇaṇ āyiṇ uṇḍaveṇ  
mulaiyaṛut tiḍuveṇ yāṇṇac ciṇaiik  
koṇḍa vāḷoḍu paḍupiṇam peyarāc  
ceṇkaḷam tuḷavuvōḷ cidainduvē ṛāgiya  
paḍumagaṇ kiḍakkai kāṇūu  
īṇra jñāṇriṇum periduvan daṇaḷē.  
(Puraṇāṇūru 278)*

When she heard many say, “The son of that old woman, her veins showing, dried, delicate arms with loose skin, and shrunk stomach like a lotus leaf, showed his back and ran from a ferocious battle in fear and got killed,” she was enraged, and said, “I will cut off these breasts that fed him”. With a sword in her hand, she turned over every body lying on the bloody battlefield. She finally found her son who was chopped to pieces, and felt happier than the day she had borne him!  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>3</sup>

The aged woman became instantly enraged when she heard others said that her son showed his back and died while running away from the ferocious battlefield. Then she thundered, “I will cut off these breasts that fed him the milk if it is so”. Thereafter she went to the battlefield with a sword in her hand. She turned over every body lying on the blood-soaked battlefield. She finally found her son who was chopped to pieces and felt happier than the day she gave birth to him” (*PNU* 278).

Kākaipāḍiṇiyār Nacellaiyār has assessed the mother-son relationship and the consequence of battle that was waged for the welfare of *iṇakkulu* (ethnic tribe) or for the territorial expansion of *kurunila mannaṇ* or for the political hegemony of *vēndaṇ*. The poem has set a new norm that establishes that it is not the nature of a woman to just give birth to a male child for battle and keep herself away from war but it is the nature of the mother to feel delighted for the son’s heroic act.

“Enemies attacked a warrior who fought against them bravely and killed him on the battlefield. The bereaved mother of the heroic man was very pleased with his valiant deeds. On seeing the noble act of her son, she felt tender and her withered breasts secreted milk” (*Ibid.*, 295). Thus the poetess Avvaiyār extolled the valour in her poem.

“Heroic death for a warrior on the battlefield”, by this heroic rhetoric, a woman can feel honoured. This is very significant message that the *puram* (exterior) wants to impart in the familial relationship. Bodies of the men were warranted for the hegemony or for the politics of blood-seeking battles. The *puram* poems desired to create a new kind of discourse by destroying the nature of the woman who has affection for the child. “It is a splendour to feel happy for the heroic death rather than lamenting for the death of the son who bravely fought on the battlefield”. This notion is revealed even in the compositions of woman poets. The *puram* poems illustrate the milieu in which women have become mere spectators in the male chauvinistic socio-politics where war was accorded top priority.

*īṇru purantarudal eṇtalaik kaḍaṇē*  
*cāṇrōṇ ākkudal tandaikkuk kaḍaṇē*  
*vēlvaḍittuk koḍuttal kollarkuk kaḍaṇē*  
*nanṇaḍai nalgai vēndaṇkuk kaḍaṇē*  
*oḷiruvāḷ aruṇcamam murukkik*  
*kaḷireṇḍu peyardal kāḷaikkuk kaḍaṇē.*  
*(Puranānūru 312)*

To bring forth and rear a son is my duty.  
 To make him noble is the father's.  
 To make spears for him is the blacksmith's.  
 To show him good ways is the king's.  
 And to bear  
 a bright sword and do battle,  
 to butcher enemy elephants,  
 and come back:  
 that is the young man's duty.  
 (Tr.: A.K. Ramanujan 1985: 185)

“*īṇru purantarudal eṇtalaik kaḍaṇē*” (lit. “Bearing and delivering out (a male child) is my foremost duty”) – thus begins the popular poem penned by Poṇṇuḍiyār. Besides pointing out the main duty of a woman-mother, the poem underlines the essential social role of a father, a blacksmith, a king and finally the man who ought to become a valiant hero. Through the statement of the last two stanzas that it is the duty of the young man to fight against the mighty elephant successfully, the poem tries to construct rhetoric, just fittingly to the Heroic Age.

*cirril narrūṇ parri niṇmagan*  
*yāṇḍuḷa nōveṇa viṇavudi eṇmagan*  
*yāṇḍuḷa nāyiṇum ariyēṇ ṍrum*  
*pulicēṇḍu pōgiya kallaḷai pōla*  
*īṇra vayirō iduvē*  
*tōṇruvaṇ māḍō pōrkkaḷat tāṇē.*  
*(Puranānūru 86)*

You stand against the pillar  
 of my hut and ask:

Where is your son?  
 I don't really know.  
 This womb was once  
 a lair  
 for that tiger.  
 You can see him now  
 only on battlefields.  
 (Tr.: A.K. Ramanujan 1985: 184)

When asked about her son's whereabouts, the mother says with pride to a young lady, "I do not really know. Like a mountain cave that a tiger inhabited and abandoned, is this womb that gave birth to him. He will appear on the battlefield!" Saying that the son is like a tiger and that he is on the battlefield is not only heroic but also reveals the relationship between the mother and the son during that time.

The very first stanza of Poṇmuḍiyār's poem, "*īṇru purāntarudal eṇtalaik kaḍaṇē*" ("To bring forth and rear a son is my foremost duty"), (PNU 312), candidly represents the societal role/status of the woman of the past. The Sangam texts very precisely put forth the rhetoric that for the interests of the society in which they live, their sons are to take part in the battles for the kings of small regions who aspire for political dominance. Besides giving birth to male children, womenfolk should also feel pride when their sons were killed in the battles. The poems of woman poets have tried to create a public conscience that glorifies the heroic deaths of young men on the battlefield by ruining the close relationships between mothers and sons in the name of politics. Does the glorification of young men's death in the battles between ethnic communities or in the wars between kings of small regions, as valour/heroic deed by Tamil people sound right? We need to think over it. Because two men who fought against each other in the battles were basically Tamils only.

The woman's place is unique in the ethnic tribe/community that is categorized as *kuḍi* (family/clan/tribe), *gaṇam* (class) and *maṇṇadai* (army). *Maḡaṭpārkaṇci* (wars ensuing from seeking a girl in

marriage) poems highlight a new trend. This kind of poem reveals the confrontation that existed between ethnic tribes and kings of small regions who acquired others' land by waging battles, though they were more authoritative than the ethnic tribes who were already leading hereditary life.

A woman prays to the *naḍukal* (memorial stone) for the safe return of her husband who went to war.

*kaḷiruporak kalangu kaḷalmuḷ vēli  
ariduṇ kūval ankuḍic cīrūr  
olimeṇ kūndal oṇṇudal arivai  
naḍukal kaitoḷudu paravum oḍiyādu.  
(Puranānūru 306)*

The elephants muddied the reservoirs,  
and it is hard to get drinking water  
in the small town with fine settlements  
surrounded by thorny *kalal* hedges.  
The young woman with soft, delicate  
hair and a bright forehead prays to the  
memorial stone without a break,  
and worships it.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>4</sup>

The poems under the category of *mūdiṇ mullai* (the women from the ancient pastoral line) express the mental state of the warrior tribe women affected due to wars. Aḷḷūr Naṇmullaiyār poem reveals that war was inevitable in the societal life of the day, the woman had no option but to ask her husband to win on the battlefield.

In one *puram* poem (283), it is documented that intending to save injured warriors, women applied ointment to their wounds caused on the battlefield. In memory of kings or warriors who died on battlefields, women poets glorify their heroic deeds and by reciting elegies. *It is worth mentioning that no one has composed/sang a bereavement poem/lyric in memory of the deceased relatives.* In the milieu of the Sangam period in which the death of a man was expected

to be heroic, the death of a woman caused much grief to a man. His intense bereavement was exhibited in the language which shows his deep grief-stricken condition. Needless to say, the pains that cause personal loss is profound.

*yāngupperi dāyiṇum nōyaḷa veṇaittē  
uyirceguk kallā madugaittu aṇmaiṇi  
kaḷḷi pōgiya kaḷariyam parantalai  
vellīḍaip pottiya viḷaiviragu īmattu  
oḷḷaḷar paḷḷip pāyal cērtti  
jñāngar māyndaṇaḷ maḍandai  
iṇṇum vāḷval eṇṇidaṇ paṇbē!  
(Puranāṇūru 245)*

Even though it is immense, to what level  
has this distress disease of mine gone?  
it does not have the strength to end my life.

I still live, even after my wife who went to the  
upper world was placed in a bright flame bed,  
and lit by dry wood,  
in the cremation ground's open space in the  
parched forest with *kaḷḷi*. Is this how life is?  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>5</sup>

“In the cremation ground's open space on the salty land with *kaḷḷi* (cactus/milkwood) plants, I placed the body of my young woman on a bright flame bed. Alas! I am still alive without killing myself”. This was the utterance of the man, deceased of his beloved wife which underscores the societal value of the woman. The Cēramāṇ Kōṭṭambalattut Tuñciya Mākkōdai's poem shattered the misconception that a man does not grieve any tragedy and exhibited a heart-wrenching tribute to the deceased woman.

The chronicles found in the Sangam poetry, about the plight of a woman who lost her husband, are very significant. The loss of a man in the establishment called “family” causes inestimable damage to everyone in the family, especially to his wife whose survival becomes devastated.

*kālpōl nalviḷar naruney tīṇḍādu*  
*aḍaiyiḍaik kiḍanda kaipīḷi piṇḍam*  
*veḷḷeḷ cāndoḍu pulippeydu aṭṭa*  
*vēlaivendai valci yāgap*  
*pararpey paḷḷip pāyinru vadiyum*  
*uyaval peṇḍirē mallē mādō*  
*(Puranānūru 246: 5-10)*

I am not a woman who desires to eat old rice with  
 water squeezed out and placed on leaves,  
 without fragrant ghee as pale as the seeds of a curved  
 cucumber striped like a squirrel and split open with a  
 sword, along with *vēlai* leaves cooked with tamarind,  
 and white sesame seed *thuvaḷyal*.  
 I am not one who wants to sleep on a bed of gravel,  
 without a mat.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>6</sup>

Peruṅkōppēṇḍu, the bereaved wife of the deceased king Bhūdappāṇḍiyan thus says that she prefers to die sitting on the funeral pyre along with the body of her husband instead of merely surviving on foodstuffs like curved cucumber, boiled *vēlai* leaves without fragrant ghee, old rice with water squeezed out, mixed with white sesame and tamarind, and sleeping on the floor without a mat. When the husband of a woman dies, her presence in society becomes irrelevant. Consequently, she confronts a lot of social distresses and ignominies. This pathetic condition of widows has been penetratingly chronicled in the stanzas of Peruṅkōppēṇḍu's poem. "It is harder for me to think of living like women who have abandoned their jewels, water dripping from their shaved heads, eating the tiny seeds of *āmbal* (white water lily) from beautiful garlands they used to wear" – thus anguishes a widow depicted in the poem (*PNU* 280) by Mārōkkattu Nappacalaiyār. The voice of the poetess very clearly details the distress of widows.

In the bereavement poem authored by the daughters of Pāri, a king of a small mountain region, we could see the spilling over of the distress



of losing their father. It is always the women who suffered the most in the political battles between men. The victorious kings used to capture the women of opponent kings, made them *koṇḍi magaḷir* (the enslaved women > harlots) and tortured them beyond a limit. After the loss of their close relatives and the prosperous life that they had, the existence of women becomes terrible; they would even struggle for proper food at times. The pain and suffering of a bereaved woman continue till date as her wealthy, powerful and very intimate spouse's death brings doom and gloom to her.

*aṛrait tingaḷ avveṇ ṇilavil*  
*endaikum uḍaiyēm emkunṇum pīrarkoḷār*  
*iṛrait tingaḷ ivveṇ ṇilavil*  
*veṇṇeri muraciṇ vēndarem*  
*kunṇum koṇḍāryām endaiyum ilamē.*  
*(Puranāṇūru 112)*

Last month, under that white moon,  
 we had our father,  
 and nobody had seized our mountain.  
 This month, under this white moon,  
 the kings with victory drums have  
 seized our mountain. We don't have  
 our father!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>7</sup>

In the state of affairs wherein their *parambu* mountain, the icon of their prosperous life was captured jointly by Cēra, Cōḷa and Pāṇḍiya kings, the two daughters of Pāri became instantly orphaned and thereby they authored this lone bereavement poem with tears. The following poem by Avvaiyār, highlighting the status of men in society, is significant.

*nāḍā gonṇō kāḍā gonṇō*  
*avalā gonṇō micaiyā gonṇō*  
*evvaḷi nallavar āḍavar*  
*avvaḷi nallai vāḷiya nilaṇē!*  
*(Puranāṇūru 187)*

May you live long, O land!  
 Whether you are cleared land,  
 forests, valleys or mountains,  
 if men who live there are good,  
 you will be good land!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>8</sup>

Avvaiyār holds the view that where men are good, there will be goodness – irrespective of the land, whether it is a just land of people's cohabitation or forest or valley or mountain. This poem places the value of man on a high pedestal. While men are interested in pursuing violence and hegemonic politics, Avvaiyār's view of judgement over the land sounds relevant even for our times.

Important aspects featured in the chronicles of woman poets concerning ancient Tamils' culture and civilization are:

- Land and woman are subjects of man. They should be under his control.
- While the *vīram* and *maṛam* were projected as the ultimate characteristics of a man, staying at home was prescribed for the woman.
- There was an attempt of relegating women to a secondary position and making her presence in society a mere substitute for men.
- The woman should be proud of giving birth to male children for battles/wars.
- The woman sheds tears of joy when her boy dies on the battlefield without showing his back.
- The politics that ruins the umbilical relationship between mother and son and glorifies the heroic death of the son on the battlefield were created.
- *Maṇṭapārkañci* (wars ensuing from seeking a girl in marriage) poems reveal the prevailing situation of neglecting a woman's personal liking and disliking.
- There was no option for a woman but to pray for her husband to return home safely with victory after a war.
- The bereavement of a husband's emotion on the demise of his wife has been accounted for in one *puram* poem.

- The social life of a woman who lost her husband is deplorable.
- There existed such a milieu that made women think that it was better to die with a dead husband than lead the painful widowhood life.
- To a woman, the death of the father, husband and son on the battlefield meant emotional distress on one hand and ruined the economic front on the other.

The woman personae depicted in the *puram* poems are completely different from the depiction of their counterparts of *akam* poems. “There was no distinctive identity for the woman in the socio-political milieu wherein woman’s individualistic functioning power was denied and centred on man”, thus chronicled the poems of woman poets.

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### Notes

1. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
2. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
3. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
4. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
5. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
6. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
7. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
8. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>

## Rituals in Pattuppāṭṭu

The life of man in ancient times depended entirely on nature. In the situation where a man had to struggle with nature's colossal power for survival, an attempt has been made to unravel anything mysterious through beliefs. The assumptions that the human mind constructed on some belief beyond reasons have grown stronger over time. Faced with constant natural disasters and attacks of wild animals, when the human mind searched for reasons, the already found reasons had rendered assurance. All beliefs in due course of time became habitual and were then established as custom. Then they took the form of rituals and became prominent in the social system. Beliefs are somehow a form of perception and rituals are a form of action. When man's belief takes shape, it becomes a ritual to be performed. Rituals performed over generations are deemed to carry some sort of supernatural power. Rituals associated with the understanding of transcendental power are considered mystical. In this state, the actions conducted by ritual performers and utterance of their words transform into something else and take the form of *mandiram* (< *mantra* (Skt.), a mystical verse). Rituals evolve into belief, custom, tradition and *mandiram*. At one stage, they transform into religion. Most rituals give a man the confidence that they can act over supernatural mystic power. Human existence on earth continues on the framework of rituals from birth to death. Through the rituals, humans become self-aware and seek to understand nature. Following

the entire rituals as observed by ancestors became a common practice. The conduct of rituals to have command over nature, in order to multiply the land fertility and to find animals for hunting, in a way, was a product of human's attempt to understand the environment. At this juncture, Sociologist George Thompson's "Theory of Reflexivity" that "The ritual has evolved by reflexing or imitating what others did" needs to be compared. Human's efforts that try to dominate the environment through rituals and to bring the same under their control have been a recurring pattern in history.

The life of people in the Sangam Age was unlike. On one side, the bygone era had *inakkulu* (ethnic tribe) people with their distinctive identities and on the other, the *vēndar* (kings) with immense political authority prevailed. In the context of conquering land in the exterior domain being glorified as a heroic act, Tamil Nadu territory expanded with the identity of the Tamil language. In the milieu of limited communication network and transport, the Sangam poets tried to construct the widespread Tamil land through the poems into the consciousness of Tamils. This brought together the Tamils living in different communities and also facilitated cultural interactions amongst them. The customs and rituals followed by people since time immemorial garnered the attention of poets. Subsequently, these have been documented in the Sangam poems.

While the Greek, Sanskrit and Roman ancient epics have been heedful to mythologies and supernatural fantasies of the deity, the Sangam literary texts uniquely prevail as secular compositions. Although the folk religion with the distinctive identities of ethnic tribes was in practice, the impact of Vedic and non-Vedic religions has been prevalent to some extent in the Tamil land. The rituals, based on religious beliefs, had the hope of people. The beliefs, customs and rituals of the ancient Tamils are accounted for in the Sangam poems. They are useful to understand the life of Tamils who lived in the bygone era. The rituals detailed in *Pattuppāṭṭu* with a unique theme are relatively exceptional.

In ancient societies, women were believed to possess high mystical powers. The woman, apart from being the source of reproduction and growth of her ethnic community, was also capable of functioning independently and leading her society. The woman was considered crucial in the religious sphere not only in the matrilineal time, but also in the Sangam era where man's authority strengthened with the collapse of matrilineal society. It is to be noted that a woman from *kuravar* (fowlers) community conducts the *veriyāḍal* (orgiastic dance) ritual to pacify Murugaṇ, the God of *kuṛiñci* region.

*āṇtalaik koḍiyoḍu maṇṇi amaivara  
 neyyōḍu aiyavi appi yaiduraittuk  
 kuḍandam paṭṭu koḷumalar cidari  
 muraṇkoḷ uruviṇ iraṇḍuḍaṇ uḍṭi  
 cennūl yāttu veṇpori cidari  
 madavali nilaiiya mātṭāṭ koḷuviḍaik  
 kurudiyōḍu viraiiya tūveḷ arici  
 cilpalic ceydu palpirap pirṭic  
 ciṛupacu mañcaḷoḍu naṛuvirai teḷittu  
 peruntaṇ kaṇavīra naṛuntaṇ mālai  
 tuṇaiyara aruttut tūnga nārri  
 naḷimalaic cilambil naṇṇagar vāḷtti  
 naṛumpugai eṭuttu kuṛiñci pāḍi  
 imiḷicai aruviyoḍu inṇiyam kaṇanga  
 uruvap palpūt tūuy veruvarak  
 kurudic centiṇaip parappi kuṛamagaḷ  
 murugiyam niṛuttu muraṇiṇar uṭka  
 murugārrup paḍutta urukeḷu viyaṇagar  
 (Tirumurugārruppaḍai, Lines 227-248)*

To invite Murukan, a woman from the dense mountain planted a flag with a man's head and a bird's body, applied ghee and tiny mustard seed paste, chanted softly, worshipped strewing big flowers, wore clothing of two different shapes, tied red thread, scattered puffed rice, mixed the blood of a fat male goat with great strength and huge legs, gave many offerings, offered fragrant water and

small, fresh turmeric, hung cool, red oleander  
 garlands together,  
 spread fragrant smoke, sang *kurinji* tune songs,  
 played musical instruments that sounded along  
 with roaring waterfalls, threw as offerings many  
 flowers with various shapes, spread fear-causing  
 blood with red millet, and played instruments to  
 please him, that caused fear in non-believers in  
 the fierce, huge temple of Murukan.  
 Singing loudly in the *veriyāttam* ground with  
 frenzied dances, as horns were blown and  
 curved bells were rung, the devotees praised the  
 brave elephant Pinimukam that does not back off.  
 Murukan lives there forever for those who worship  
 as they desire, like they have attained, as I am aware.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>1</sup>

The spirit possessed *kurappen* (fowler woman) planted a rooster flag, rubbed ghee and white mustard paste, chanted the *mantra* skilfully and worshipped Lord Murugaṇ with folded hands by strewing big flowers. Dressed in two different colours, she tied the red thread in her hand, put the white puffed rice, mixed with the blood of a fat male goat on the altar, offered pure white rice, gave many offerings along with fresh turmeric, hung cool, red oleander garlands, spread fragrant smoke and adored for the mountain town to be prosperous without hunger, disease and enmity. The *kurappen* hailed the fine mountain towns, sang *kuriñci* melodies, played sweet music, threw many flowers as offerings, and spread the fierce blood with red millet to please the Lord Murugaṇ. Thus, the *veriyāḍal* (orgiastic dance) performance of *kurappen* was very minutely described in *Tirumurugārṟuppaḍai* (TMA). The poet Nakkirar's description about the presence of the woman who took part in the *veriyāḍal* ritual is significant in terms of religion. "With decked bangles clasping forearms together *veriyāṭṭu magaḷir* (orgiastic woman dancers) prayed to Lord Murugaṇ. The *veriyāṭṭam* ritual dances were performed by dancing girls on the streets" (*Paṭṭiṇappālai*, Lines 154-155), "From one side the

forest looked like a *veriyāttam* ritual ground created by a *vēlan*” (*Maduraikkāñci* (MK), Line 284), “Adorning himself with the rainy season’s *kurinci* flowers, *vēlan* (a tribal priest) prayed to Murugaṇ, wearing *kadambam* flowers. In all the common grounds, women held hands and performed *kuravai* dances” (MK, Lines 613-615). Thus, the *kuravaikkūttu* (dance in a circle prevalent among the women of hill tracts) was conducted as an important ritual by the mountain dwellers. It is a fact that women performed the *kuravaikkūttu* and *veriyāṭṭuc caḍanguḷ* (rituals of orgiastic dance) as part of worship. Through the Murugaṇ worship, we understand that no situation excluded women from conducting religious rituals.

*Neḍunalvāḍai*, another long poem in *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology, depicted women worshipping god in the evening time as follows:

*maḍavaral magaḷir piḍakaip peyda*  
*cevvī arumbiṇ painkāl pittigattu*  
*avviḍaḷ aviḷpadam kamaḷap poḷudaṇindu*  
*irumbucey viḷakkiṇ īrttiri koḷī*  
*nellum malarum tūuy kaitoḷudu*  
*mallal āvaṇam mālai ayara*  
*(Neḍunalvāḍai, Lines 39-44)*

Tender, naive women with bamboo-like arms, delicate looks, teeth resembling pearls, white conch-shell bangles on their tight forearms, and moist, pretty eyes that matched their beautiful earrings, carried long, green-stemmed jasmine buds in trays. The flower buds opened their pretty petals and blossomed, their spreading fragrance announcing the arrival of evening time.

They lit the oil-dipped wicks of iron lamps, pressed their palms together and worshipped, tossing offerings of rice paddy and flowers, and celebrated evenings in the prosperous market.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>2</sup>



The women hold the flower buds of green sheaths in beautiful trays. As the flower buds started opening, the women, knowing that the evening has come, will give the iron lamp's oil dipped wicks. They worshipped the home-dwelling god with their folded hands and sprinkled paddy and flowers. The ritual of worshipping deity/god in the evening is still prevalent in Tamil Nadu. Lighting lamps became a ritual, as the ancient Tamil people feared that some dreadful mountain deities or wild animals would harm them during the night. They tried to overcome the fear of the night by worshipping the light at sunset time.

The description of market-street in *Paṭṭiṇappālai* is related to the belief in God.

*maiyaru cirappiṇ deyvam cērttiya  
 malaraṇi vāyil palartolu koḍiyum  
 varupuṇal tanda veṇmaṇal kānyārru  
 urukelu karumbiṇ onpūp pōlak  
 kūluḍaik kolumañcigai  
 tāluḍait taṇpaṇiyattu  
 vālaricip palicidari  
 pāgugutta pacumēlukkiṇ  
 kālūnriya kavikiḍugiṇ  
 mēlūnriya tugirkoḍiyum  
 (Paṭṭiṇappālai, Lines 159-168)*

At a temple with a faultless, great god, there are flags adored by many near the entrance decorated with flowers.

Sandal paste is spread on the floor,  
 spears are planted on the ground, and shields  
 turned upside down are hung on them.

Above these are flags made of cloth, appearing  
 like bright, beautiful sugarcane flowers that  
 bloom on the shores of forest streams with  
 white sand brought by flowing waters.

Warriors who fell in battle are worshipped  
 with many baskets of cooked food placed

on fabric spread on the ground on which  
white rice and flowers are strewn as offerings.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>3</sup>

Flags greeted by many people were tied at the doorsteps of the houses decorated with flowers to please the home-dwelling faultless/absolute God. White rice was sprinkled as a sacrificial item in the place where paddy, rice and cold items were kept, and sandalwood paste was daubed. The description of the ritual about the spread of white rice as a sacrificial item in the worship of deity reveals the prevailing belief of the time.

In *Malaipaḍukaḍām* (MPK), yet another text in *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology, the poet Iraṇiya Muṭṭattup Peruṅkuṇrūr Peruṅkaucigaṇār describes the various sounds that arose in the mountain. The following is the description of the sound that came from the *kuravaikkūttu* performance played wishfully by mountain dwellers during the Sangam period:

*naṛavunāṭ ceyda kuṛavartam peṇḍiroḍu*  
*māntōr ciṛupaṛai kaṛanga*  
*vāntōy mīmīcai ayaṛum kuravai*  
(*Malaipaḍukaḍām*, Lines 320-322)

..... The men drink  
liquor and celebrate with *kuravai* dances in the sky-high  
mountain, with their women, to the accompaniment of  
small, loud deer hide *paṛai* drums.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>4</sup>

When the drunken *kuṛavar* beat the small *paṛai* made of deer's skin loudly along with their drunken women performing *kuravaikkūttu* on the sky-high mountains, there flowed roaring sounds. The *kuravaikkūttu* which is associated with the belief in God, perhaps, have been performed as a ritual.

The food sacrificial ritual of *maruda nila makkaḷ* (people of agricultural tracts) has been acknowledged in *Porunarārruppaḍai*,

yet another text in *Pattuppāṭṭu* anthology, which describes the nature of people living in the fertile land.

*kūḍu kelīya kuḍivayinān*  
*ceñcōrra pali māndiya*  
*karuṅkākkai kavavu muṇaiyin*  
*maṇainocci niḷal āṅaṅ*  
*īrruyāmaitaṅ pārppu ōmbavum*  
 (Porunarāruppaḍai, Lines 182-186)

A black crow ate offerings with red rice,  
 and hating the contents, moves to a  
*nochi* tree with shade that grows in a  
 house, where it protects the hatchlings  
 of a tortoise.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>5</sup>

From the point of view of anthropology, it is important to note that those living in the *marudam* region offered blood-soaked rice to crows. Religious rituals are practised all over the world to encounter the distresses that a man faces in his life. Such rituals bind human beings with supernatural/mystical power. There lies a primitive belief in offering sacrificial rice to crows. The belief that the dead ancestors would come in the form of crows prevails till date among Tamils. The ritual of offering sacrificial rice to crows has evolved as a result of ancestor worship, with the belief that the departed souls would show the right path to their descendants, even after they became spirits.

*Paṭṭiṇappālai* delicately depicts the picture of *paradavar* (fishermen) living in *neydal* (seashore region/maritime tracts) region.

*ciṇaiccuṟaviṅ kōḍunaṭṭu*  
*maṇaiccērttiya vallaṅangiṇān*  
*maḍarrālai malarmalaindum*  
*piṇarppēṇṇaiṭ piḷimāndiyum*  
*pūṇṭalai irumparadavar*  
 (Paṭṭiṇappālai, Lines 87-90)

Fishermen wear garlands braided  
 with the flowers of white *koothalam*  
 plants growing at the bases of *thālai*  
 trees with aerial roots.  
 They plant horns of pregnant sharks,  
 pray to the powerful god, wear *thālai*  
 flowers, and drink liquor, of palmyra  
 trees with scaly trunks, that was offered  
 to their god.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>6</sup>

*Paradavar* installed their powerful deity in the planted horns of pregnant sharks and worshipped it. Driving the sea deity *Varuṇan* (God of Raining) into the horn of a shark and worshipping it is nothing but a ritual. A belief is prevalent among the fishermen that the said god would protect them from sharks without any harm when they go for fishing in the sea. Fishermen may have thought that they would gain the strength of the shark by worshipping the horn of the powerful shark of the sea.

By associating it with sacredness, bathing has been presented as a ritual in *Maduraikkāñci*.

*maḷaikolaḷak kuraiyādu puṇalpuga migādu*  
*karaiporudu irangum munnīr pōla*  
*koḷakkolaḷak kuraiyādu tarattara migādu*  
*kaḷunīr koṇḍa eḷunāl andi*  
*āḍutuvanru viḷaviṇ nāḍu ārttanrē*  
*māḍam pīraṅgiya malipugaḷk kūḍal*  
*nāḷangāḍi nanantalaik kambalai.*  
 (*Maduraikkāñci*, Lines 424-430)

Like the loud ocean, with waves that batter shores, that does not get reduced despite the clouds taking water, nor swell when the rivers bring water, the things in the market in Koodal do not get decreased by selling or get increased by new things that are brought in.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>7</sup>

The description of holy water—taking a bath on the seventh day’s twilight—indicates that if anyone bathes in water on a specific day, his/her sin will disappear. In the Sangam era itself, the belief evolved that the water body is sacred. Subsequently, it progressed as a ritual later to make people believe that taking a bath in the water body will wipe off their sins. In this regard, there is a reference about *kaḍal nīrāḍudal* (bathing in sea waters) in *Paṭṭiṇappālai*.

*tērunīrp puṇariyōḍu yārutalai maṇakkum  
maliyōdattu olikūḍal  
tīdunīnga kaḍalāḍiyum  
(Paṭṭiṇappālai, Lines 97-99)*

Kāviri joins the ocean with clear water,  
where roaring wave sounds can be heard.  
People swim and play in the ocean  
to remove evil.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>8</sup>

“If anyone takes bath in the water body where Kāviri river meets the sea, the sins will disappear” – this belief, in a sense, is conducted as a ritual. Water bodies are considered sacred in the lives of Sangam Tamils who worshipped nature. The continuum of ancient religious belief is prevailing even today that supernatural power rests within every natural entity.

The Sangam Tamils, who have the belief in deity’s dwelling in nature, worshipped the forest. When they went through the dense forest full of trees, they performed rituals for their safety. *Porunarārruppaḍai* elucidates the ritual performed by passers-through the forest for *kāḍurai deyvam* (the forest-dwelling deity).

*pāḍina pāṇik kēṛpa nāltorum  
kaḷīru vaḷangatark kāṇat talgi  
ilaiyil marāatta evvam tāngi  
valaivalan daṇṇa meṇṇilal marungil  
kāḍurai kaḍavulkaḍaṇ kaḷippiya  
(Porunarārruppaḍai, Lines 48-52)*

Singing to rhythmic beats every day,  
 you stay in the forest on a path where  
 bull elephants roam, under a *kadampam* tree  
 without leaves,  
 its meagre shade like that of a hung net,  
 and make your offerings to the god that  
 dwells in the forest.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>9</sup>

Those who go through the forest offer sacrifices to the god that dwells there and perform rituals to its rejoice. It was the backdrop of the evolution of ritual because of the idea that anything could happen suddenly while crossing through the widespread dreadful forest.

Worshipping *naḍukal*, the planted stone in memory of a warrior who sacrificed his life for the welfare of his ethnic community, is associated with ancestor's worship. There is a reference about the memorial stone, planted on the way to the patron, in *Malaipaḍukaḍām*.

*oṇṇāt tevvar ulaiviḍat tārtteṇa*  
*nalvalik koḍutta nāṇḍai maṇavar*  
*cellā nallicaip peyarōḍu naṭṭa*  
*kallēcu kavalai eṇṇumigap palavē*  
*iṇburu muraṇkaium pāṭṭuvirup pāgat*  
*tonroḷugu marabiṇum maruppiguttut tuṇaimiṇ*  
*(Malaipaḍukaḍām, Lines 386-391)*

..... There are many  
 memorial stones on confusing, forked paths planted  
 for warriors of fine, unruined fame who fought  
 and died, embarrassed after enemy uproars in the field.  
 Sing sweetly with rhythm, and play your lute with a  
 stem and worship the memorial stones. Proceed rapidly  
 after that.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>10</sup>

A *porunaṇ* (a war bard), who was a recipient of gifts from a patron, guides his fellow war bard to him for the same benefit: "When you go through the forest, you would come across many memorial stones on

the path. You would be confused. So, look out for the memorial stone inscribed with the name of the *vīra maravaṇ* (heroic warrior) who fought against the enemy. While you cross the said memorial stone, you play your *yāl* with the melodious tunes to the liking of the deity dwelling in the memorial stone”. While *naḍukal* has been considered as a symbol of *vīram*, respecting it while passing has become a ritual.

The Sangam Tamils, who lead *tiṇaicār vāḷkkai* (landscape-oriented life) by closely mingling with nature, lived the traditional life with their own beliefs and customs. In their attempt to understand nature, they did not give much importance to either the great miracles or mythologies related to gods. However, they performed traditional rituals. Rituals that are performed in the faith of God are found negligibly in the ten long poems known as *Pattuppāṭṭu*. If we analyse them collectively, we may conclude that they are largely nature-oriented.

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### Notes

1. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-thirumurukatrappadai/>
2. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-nedunalvadai/>
3. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-pattinappalai/>
4. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-malaipadukadam/>
5. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/a-porunaratrappadai/>
6. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-pattinappalai/>
7. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-mathuraikanchi/>
8. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-pattinappalai/>
9. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/a-porunaratrappadai/>
10. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-malaipadukadam/>

## Divulgence of Life in Okkūr Mācāttiyār Poetry

The Sangam literary texts serve as a vital source to learn about the ancient Tamils. The five-fold landscape was categorized to accustom the land and season in Tamils' minds. The lingering delightful scenarios of nature divulge the knowledge of the ecosystem. *Tiṇaik Kōṭpādu* (Theory of Poetical Landscape) gives a magical charm to poetry. The uniqueness of the Sangam poetry is the union of land and season i.e. from *kuṛiñci* (mountain region) with *kūdirkkālam* (cold season) to *pālai* (barren region) with *muduvēṇil* (peak summer). In the Sangam poems, we could simultaneously see the depiction of the collapse of the communal life of the ethnic tribes and the ascendancy of kings of small regions or kings. The vestiges of *tāyvaḷic camūgam* (matrilineal society) existed among the asymmetrical ethnic tribes. In the changing social scenario, relishing land in “exterior life” and enjoying women in “interior life” were contrived as the hallmarks of man.

The territorial expansion by projecting the Tamil language during the Sangam era paved the way for the emergence of feudal society. A custom of ethnic tribes—eating the food that was hunted collectively and sharing it among themselves—had begun to change. People's lifestyle was transformed due to sowing grains and rearing livestock on the land acquired by forest burning. *Pāṇargaḷ* and *pulavargaḷ*



wandered the Tamil land and augmented social development. Along with *pāḍiṇigal* (songstresses), woman poets recited/sang the poems/songs of bards' tradition.

Through the Sangam poems, the family system was put in place against the natural way of a woman's life. The micro-politics is embedded in the texts that eulogise the patient waiting of the woman for her departed husband. Excessive deliberations and merriments on *kādal*, in fact, are machinations in favour of the attitude against woman's body by limiting it to four stages viz. *kaṇṇi* (a virgin), *maṇaivi* (wife), *parattai* (concubine) and *kaimpeṇ* (widow). The fables depicting the romantic love as sacred, a continuum of the previous birth or prolonging relationship in the succeeding birth, etc., that are fashioned on *kādal* wholly aim at the woman. The sexual life of the woman was demarcated as *kādal* and *karpu*. However, *kādal*, *kaḷavolukkam* (clandestine love conduct) and *parattamai* (adultery of a married man) were accredited for man, which, in fact, dissipates the equation of man-woman position. The myth, "woman means gentleness" is to be compared here with the attributes of man.

The presence of 41 woman poets during the Sangam era reveals that women were literate and had the ability to compose poems. Poems by women adhering to the Sangam convention are significant. Of these, Okkūr Mācāttiyār poems are quite unique. The poetess Mācāttiyār belonged to Okkūr in Śivagangai district. She composed eight poems in total five in *kuṟuntogai*, two in *Akanāṇṇūru* and one in *Puraṇāṇṇūru*. Examination of her poems that linger by putting forth the bountiful *mullai nilam* (forest region/sylvan tracts) suggests that she perhaps belonged to Okkūr village near Tiruvārūr town.

Of Mācāttiyār's eight poems, seven belonged to *akam* and one to *puram*. Of seven *akam* poems, six dealt with the theme of *mullait tiṇai* (patient waiting) and one with the *marudam tiṇai* (sulking). The woman's mind is documented in the poems that lingered in the *mullai* (forest) landscape.

Next to *kuriñci* (mountain) region, *mullai nilam* i.e. the forest and its adjoining region has prominence in the five-fold regions category. During that time the forest was a flourishing region. Forest-grown plants were the source of biodiversity. By rearing cattle, man's life grew in a naturally fertile environment. Over time, the owner of cattle became the proprietor and subsequently socially dominant. Battles like *veṭci* (cattle raiding) took place because of cattle. *Naḍukal* worship was performed for the warrior who died in the battle of *ānirai kavardal* (cattle-lifting) or *ānirai mīṭṭal* (cattle-retrieving). *Iṇakkuḷu vīram* (gallantry of the ethnic community) turned out to be the business of cattle protection.

“Waiting with patience”, the theme of *mullait tiṇai* (forest region) has been wholly attributed to a woman. The hallmark of the married woman is that she should wait with patience at home for the husband who went away to take part in battle/war or in search of wealth. This strengthens the institution called “family”. Because of their actions, man's world is expanding in the outer domain. Waiting for a man in the home is what is adored as “*mullai cārnda kaṇṇu*” (“chastity leaned upon sylvan tracts”). Where did the man go? When will he come? In such an uncertain situation, waiting for him to return in *kārkālam* (rainy season), in a sense, can be stressful and cause distress to the woman. Against this backdrop, the poems of *mullai* (patient waiting) theme unfolding in the milieu of the rainy season are unique.

Okkūr Mācāttiyār's poems usually account the subtleties of the woman's mind in the natural backdrop.

*iḷamai pāṛār vaḷanacaiic cenṛōr*  
*ivaṇum vārār evaṇarō veṇa*  
*peyalpuraṇ tanda pūṇkoḍi mullait*  
*togumugai ilangeyi rāga*  
*nagumē tōḷi naṇuntaṇ kārē.*  
*(Kuruntogai 126)*

He did not think about youth  
when he went desiring wealth.  
He has not come back and I  
wonder where he is.

The clusters of bright buds,  
on the *mullai* vines that bear  
flowers, nurtured by the fragrant,  
cool rain, appear to laugh at me,  
my friend.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>1</sup>

In the above quoted poem, a *talaivi* laments to her *tōḷi* about her unpleasant situation: “Where did my man go in search of wealth without thinking of amusing merriment? He hasn’t come back yet. It is drizzling in the cold rainy season. The rows of flower buds on the delicate *mullai* vines laugh at me over my helplessness. What will I do my girlfriend?” She imagines that even the natural phenomenon of flowering is laughing at her condition. The woman’s emotion inclined upon nature has transcended into poetic lines here. Maybe her man promised her that his chariot would arrive before the rainy season.

The feeling of a woman filled with remorse, “My eyes lost sleep for the man who hailed from to a country where buds bloom like teeth in the *mullai* vine” (*KṚT* 186), is significant.

*paḷamaḷaik kalitta puduppuna varagin*  
*iralai mēynda kuraittalaip pāvai*  
*aruvicēr marungil pūṭṭa mullai*  
*verugucirit taṇṇa pacuvī menpiṇik*  
*kurumugai aṇḍa naṇumalarp puravin*  
*vaṇḍucūḷ mālaiyum vārār*  
*kaṇḍicin tōḷi poruṭpirin dōrē.*  
(*Kuruntogai* 220)

Look my friend!

Past rains have produced new millet in  
the field, stags have grazed the grains  
and trimmed the stalks leaving millet

stubble with tips, and delicate jasmine  
flowers have blossomed from tight buds  
in the forest, appearing like the teeth of  
laughing wildcats.

My man with a bee-swarmed garland  
has not returned from his wealth-seeking  
trip.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>2</sup>

As a male deer grazed the foliage of millet that grew on the mountain land during the rainy season, nearby the tips of millet stubble and fresh flowers of jasmine bloomed like the wild cat laughter in the field. The heroine expresses her anguish to her friend that it's evening already but the man, who went in search of wealth, has not yet returned. Mācāttiyār's poems illustrate the craving emotion of the woman that her man has not come back even after the blooming of jasmine flowers in the rainy season.

There are two different kinds of woman's feelings detailed in the *mullai* poems authored by Mācāttiyār. Three poems illustrate the woman's patient wait for the departed husband and an equal number of poems account for the rejoicing the mood of the woman expecting the return of her husband. The poetical deliberations on women personae of patiently waiting and of the feeling of excitement over the man's return are seemingly juxtaposed.

*mullai ūrnda kalluyar bērik*  
*kaṇḍaṇam varugam ceṇmō tōḷi*  
*ellūrc cērtarum ēruḍai inattup*  
*pullār nallāṇ pūṇmaṇi kollō?*  
*ceyviṇai muḍitta cemmaḷ uḷḷamoḍu*  
*valvil ilaiyar pakkam pōrra*  
*īrmaṇar kāṭṭāru varūum*  
*tērmaṇi kollāṇḍu iyambiya uḷavē!*  
(Kuruntogai 275)

My friend! Let's climb on the  
 boulders covered with jasmine  
 vines to see whether he's returning.  
 I hear the sounds of bells!  
 Are they tied on the cows returning  
 to the town in the evening after  
 grazing with their herds with bulls?  
 Or, are the sounds from his  
 chariot bells as he rides on wet sand  
 on the path, protected by his young  
 warriors with strong bows, his heart  
 satisfied upon completion of his task?  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>3</sup>

“The bulls and cows with their herd are coming back to the town in the evening after grazing grass. Do you hear the sound of bells tied around their necks? Do you hear the sound of *talaivaṇ*’s chariot rolling on the wet sand of forest tract, followed by the archers of accomplished the mission?” The *talaivi* who climbed up and stood on a rocky boulder asks her friend to join her to see where the sound is coming from. Mācāttiyār’s description of monsoon season, comprising continuous rains, wet ground, *mullaikkoḍi* (jasmine vine) and evening time is fabulous. It is in this context that the bell rings. Was it the sound of the tingling bells tied to the cow’s neck? Or of the bell tied to the chariot? Though her mind was confused, yet her hope shot up that sure her man would come back soon.

*virundum perugunaḷ pōlum tirundiḷait*  
*taḍamen paṇaittōḷ maḍamoli arivai*  
*taḷiriyal kiḷḷai inidiṇ eḍutta*  
*vaḷarāp piḷḷait tūvi yaṇṇa*  
*uḷarpeyal vaḷartta paimpayirp puravil*  
*paraikkaṇ aṇṇa niraiccuṇai tōrum*  
*tuḷipaḍu mokkuḷ tuḷḷuvaṇ cālat*  
*toḷiporu poguṭṭut tōṇruvaṇa māya*  
*vaḷiciṇai udirttaliṇ verikoḷbu tāayc*  
*cirarcira gēyppa aṇṇaṇ varitta*  
*vaṇḍuṇ naṇuvī tumitta nēmi*

*taṇṇila marungil pōḷnda valiyuḷ  
niraicel pāmbiṇ viraibunīr muḍugac  
cellum neḍuntagai tērē  
mullai mālai nagarpugal āyndē.  
(Akanāṇūru 324)*

The soft-spoken woman with delicate,  
bamboo-like shoulders and perfectly  
made jewels will celebrate today, it  
appears.

Since rain has fallen, the bushes in the  
forest are lush and green like the feathers  
of young parrots raised sweetly, that are  
of delicate nature. In the muddy soil  
rain drops fall creating bubbles that  
appear and burst like the bubbles created  
in the full springs resembling the eyes of  
drums.

Fragrant flowers from which bees drink  
honey, drop from tree branches in the wind,  
spread like the wings of kingfishers on the  
flowing water and get chopped by the chariot  
wheels of the greatly esteemed man who  
arrives home thinking, at evening time when  
mullai flowers blossom. On the path where  
the cool ground is split by chariot wheels,  
rain water flows rapidly like rows of snakes  
following one another.  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>4</sup>

“Having the bountiful rains, the forest became very attractive and looked like the tendered feathers of young parrots”. The said description on the prosperity of forest by Mācāttiyār is a minute account of nature. The droplets of rainwater that fell into the springs of muddy soil looked like the buds of lotuses that came up and dissolved; the flow of chariot’s wheels in the rainy streams seemed like long snakes swimming in fast waters; the noble man’s chariot entered

swiftly into the town in the evening when jasmine flowers bloomed. Thus, the natural scenes have been successively documented in the above-said poem. Finally, it ends with the note that the soft-spoken woman with delicate bamboo-like shoulders will have the feast today. With a desire to describe the scene of the esteemed man's chariot entering the town, the poet Mācāttiyār has canvassed the beautiful *mullai* region with alluring scenes. They have emerged with poetical loveliness.

*irunda vēndaṇ aruntoḷil muḍittēṇa*  
*purinda kādaloḍu peruntēr yāṇum*  
*ēriyadu arindaṇru alladu vanda*  
*ārunaṇi arindaṇrō ilaṇē tāay*  
*muyarpaṇaḷ ugaḷum mullaṇiyam puṇavil*  
*kavaikkadir varagiṇ cīrūr āṇkaṇ*  
*melliyaḷ arivai ilvayiṇ niṇṇi*  
*iḷimiṇ eṇṇraṇiṇ moḷimaruṇ ḍiciṇē*  
*vāṇvaḷangu iyarkai vaḷipūṭ ṭiṇaiyō*  
*māṇuru vāgaṇiṇ maṇampūṭ ṭiṇaiyō*  
*uraimadi vāḷiyō valava eṇattaṇ*  
*varaimaruḷ mārbīṇ naḷippaṇaṇ muyangi*  
*maṇaikkōṇḍu pukkaṇaṇ neḍuntagai*  
*viruntēr perraṇaḷ tiruntīlai yōḷē.*  
*(Akanāṇūru 384)*

I was with the king when the difficult war business ended. With love, I got on the chariot. Other than knowing that, I was not much aware of the big path. We passed through lovely woodlands with jasmine flowers, where young hares frolic in the millet fields with bent grain stalks, and you stopped the chariot in front of the house where my delicate woman lives, and asked me to get down. I was surprised at your words. I praised you and asked you whether you tied the wind in the sky as horses to your chariot, or whether your mind acted as a swift horse”,

the esteemed man with a chest like a  
 mountain hugged his charioteer and took him  
 into the house, as his woman with fine jewels  
 received a gift.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>5</sup>

The king accomplished the battle with victory. Soon he mounted on the chariot. But he wondered when the charioteer asked him to get down sooner as the latter stopped the chariot—even though he passed through a long path of woodlands with jasmine, where young hares jump in the millet fields—in front of the house where his mild natured wife lives. Thereupon, the king asked the charioteer whether he tied to nature's wind as horses to the chariot or his mind acted like a swift deer. Pleased with his skillful driving, the king hugged the charioteer and took him into his home. His wife had the special chance to extend hospitality to him.

The heart of *talaivaṇ*, who came as fast as wind after completing his mission successfully, yearns for his wife. The hero, who arrived in thinking of his wife and reached his home in a fine circumstance, praises his charioteer. Without any mention of how the *talaivaṇ* and *talaivi* spoke to themselves and embraced, the poem very finely documented the craving for romantic love. Mācāttiyār's description of the passion and anxiety of their hearts that yearned to see each other is delightful poetic.

In the *marudam* (agricultural tract) poem, we may notice the sulking mood of a *talaivi*, who warns her husband to not come on our street with hurtful gossip that sounds like the calls of the short-legged, house-dwelling hen to her distressed chicks, when darkness sets in and wild cats linger near fences looking for openings (*KṚT* 139). The image of a woman who does not know anything except sulking with her husband is revealed in this poem. The impression of the poem is that the world of the man can be anything, but all that a woman can do is sulk.



Okkūr Mācāttiyār's lone *puram* poem is outstanding in highlighting the heroic rhetoric. The *puram* poems that portray the *vīram* of Sangam Tamils focus only on the heroic qualities of man. Whereas the *akam* poems conceptualised that the attribute of a woman is to stay at home waiting for her husband. As a mammal, a woman naturally has the trait of loving her children. In the passage of time, she acquired the capability of creating a community around her. Violence is never warranted by the woman. The world of men begins with relishing the land in the exterior sphere and ends at battles. Leaving his mother in his teenage, he takes part in the battles and sometimes even dies. The woman just becomes a substitute in the newly constructed discourse wherein the *vīram* and *maṟam* were stated as the ultimate characteristics of man. The *puram* poems largely facilitated the emergence of a situation wherein a woman was fully brought under the authority of the man, by taking away her independence and forcing her to be dependent on the latter.

In the milieu where the battle was waged for the territorial expansion of *kurunila maṇṇaṇ* or *vēndaṇ*, *Puraṇāṇūru* poems portrayed that the women must give birth to male children to take part in wars. A new paradigm related to the attribute of motherhood was then defined that the mother should feel proud of the martyrdom of the son who died on the battlefield by taking wounds on his chest. The political relationship between mother and son was projected more than their umbilical cord relationship. The delight of a mother for the *vīra maraṇam* (the heroic death) of the son was more adored than the tragedy of losing him on the battlefield. The poem by Okkūr Mācāttiyār, beginning with the stanza, "*keḍuga cindai kaḍidivaḷ tuṇivē*" ("May her thoughts be ruined! Her will is strong"), (PNU 279), has constructed a new image of the mother.

*keḍuga cindai kaḍidivaḷ tuṇivē*  
*mūdiṇ magali rādal tagumē*  
*mēnāl urra ceruvir kivaḷtaṇṇai*  
*yāṇai erindu kaḷattolīn daṇaṇē*

*nerunal urra ceruvir kivaḷkoḷunaṇ*  
*perunirai vilangi āṇḍuppaṭ taṇaṇē*  
*iṇrum cerupparai kēṭṭu viruppurru mayangi*  
*vēlkaik koḍuttu vēḷidu virittuḍṭi*  
*pārumayirk kuḍumi eṇṇey nīvi*  
*orumagaṇ alladu illōḷ*  
*cerumugam nōkkic celgeṇa viḍumē*  
*(Puranānūru 279)*

May her thoughts be ruined! Her will is fierce!  
 She is from an ancient line, and this is fitting!  
 Her father, day before yesterday, killed an  
 elephant and then fell in the battlefield. Yesterday,  
 her husband blocked and drove off warriors who  
 came for huge cattle herds, and was killed in battle.

Today, when she heard the *parai* drum, desire rose  
 in her. Overwhelmed, she who had nobody other  
 than her only young son, placed a spear in his hands,  
 smeared oil in his dry hair tuft, covered him with  
 white cloth, and bade him to march toward the  
 battlefield.  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>6</sup>

Upon hearing the battle drums beat, the woman felt indecisive about  
 whom to send to the battle that day, as she had already lost her father  
 and husband to the battles that were held a day before yesterday and  
 the day before. The very next moment, with a clear mind, she called  
 her only son. She dressed him in white clothes, smeared hair with  
 oil to his hair tuft, placed a spear in his hands and sent him to the  
 battlefield. "Let her courageous mind be delighted. Her fearlessness is  
 immense. Being addressed as a courageous woman from the ancient  
 family, she just deserves such acclaim". Thus the poet Mācāttiyār  
 expresses delightfully. Through this poem, it is illustrated that for a  
 woman, the ethnic tribe to which she belonged was more important  
 than the well-being of her family. This is why the poetess came up  
 with a fine poetic discourse highlighting the bravery of the woman

who wilfully sent her only son to the battlefield after the martyrdom of her father and husband.

### Literary Luxuriance

Mācāttiyār's *mullait tiṇai* poems demonstrate the splendour of nature. The adjectives attributed to the *mullai* (jasmine) flower are aesthetic. Through the jasmine flower, the mind of woman, who waits for her husband, is illustrated as follows: “*peyal purantanda pūṅkoḍi mullai*” (“delicate jasmine vines nurtured by the fragrant, cool rain”), (*KRT* 126: 3), “*mullai meṅkoḍi*” (“delicate jasmine vine”), (*Ibid.*, 186: 2), “*pūṭta mullai*” (“bloomed jasmine”), “*mullai ūrnda kal*” (“boulders covered with jasmine vine”), (*Ibid.*, 275: 1), “*mullai mālai*” (“evening time when jasmine blooms”), (*ANU* 324: 15), “*mullaiyam puravu*” (“woodland with jasmine”), (*Ibid.*, 384: 5). “*verugu cirittaṇṇa pacuvī meṇpiṇi / kuṟumugai aṇḍa naṟumalarp puravu*” (“jasmine which have bloomed from tight buds like the teeth of laughing wildcats”), (*KRT* 220: 3-4), the simile is sheer aesthetic.

The description of a scene detailing the flow of jasmine flowers chopped by chariot wheels in the rain streams that drag them down, and their resemblance to the long snakes swimming in fast waters, is a fine simile that emerged from the wisdom of nature.

The description by *talaivi* that the rows of bright buds of *mullai* look like their teeth and assuming that they are laughing at her, is the zenith of imagination.

Okkūr Mācāttiyār's *akam* poems on *mullai* landscape earnestly revealed the passion of the woman's mind, highlighted “the patient wait of women”, the *mullait tiṇai* theme to everyone's amusement. At the same time, her lone *puram* poem uniquely canvassed the bravery of a woman who wilfully sent her only son to the battlefield after the martyrdom of her father and husband.

The poetess Mācāttiyār might have sung many more such poems. However, the poetical compositions that are currently available are certainly a boost to her poetic personality.

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### Notes

1. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-1-200/>
2. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-201-400/>
3. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-201-400/>
4. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-301-400/>
5. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-akananuru-301-400/>
6. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>



## Construction of ‘Feminine Language’ in Elegies

Language is not merely a tool for communication. For human beings, language acts as the sixth sense which functions through memories. Human beings share their experiences with each other on the basis of language. The continuum of society has become possible as language imposes history on man through the discourse of the past. Language also performs the subtle act of connecting the man with society. Besides constructing ideas, the transmission executed through language also reconstructs the ideas of presenter and listener. Language functions as memories at an individualistic level and as an antithesis between two human beings. The language created by society in the human bodies functions as the “sense of knowing” of those bodies. It is through the said sense, the bodies understand society. Authority gets dominance by the supervision and control of such senses. At a societal level, all activities are done through the language.

It is not possible to have meaning for an object. The reason being, there exists no meaning to the object. The cause of the language’s meaning will not be known explicitly. In a way, when the language acquires meaning, it dominates the whole society. “The meaning of an object is the meaning rendered in the contrived language under whose control is the authority”. The said statement made by Foucault

is to be noted. The person, who has seized the language and power to rule it only, becomes the ruler.

In the case of Tamil, deliberations on language have been constructed right from *Tolkāppiyam*, the earliest grammatical treatise. A woman's identity is fully constructed by a man on the basis of gender, by cooking up the difference between man and woman through 'language'. The language strengthened the male-authority (in the woman world) in the male-female relationship when the woman was deprived of her primary position and patrilineal society was established. The male-language had created myths in Sangam literature such as *tāymai* (motherhood), *peṇmai* (womanhood) and giving birth to a male child are marvellous acts.

*taṇṇuru vēṭkai kiḷavaṇ murkiḷattal*  
*eṇṇuṅkālaik kiḷattikku illai.*  
 (Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷadigāram, Kaḷaviyal 116)

“Expressing her sexual desire before the husband first  
 is not conventional for the wife when such thought occurs”

*Kādalaṇ* (lover) can speak *kādal mōli* (romantic love-language), but *kādali* (ladylove) should not speak the same” – thus *Tolkāppiyam* tries to define the womanhood.

*taṇṇuḷ kiḷavi kiḷavaṇ murkiḷattal*  
*ettirattāṇum kiḷattikku illai*  
 (Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷadigāram, Kaṇṇiyal 178)

“Words of self-praising before the husband  
 is in no way conventional for the wife”

The *akam* convention holds its view of male-language that *kiḷatti* (legitimate wife) has no right to utter self-praising words in front of her *kiḷavaṇ* (legitimate husband).

Since ancient times, the woman was placed in the secondary position. The woman has been attributed certain exclusive characteristics. From their childhood days, people are taught that the man is born to

control and rule the woman and is being heroic. A woman is to be submissive and expected to act for her man's well-being. For ages, such socialization has happened only through language. Hence, modern feminists criticize today's language and view it as a tool oppressing them since time immemorial.

Critical Linguistics plays an important role in explaining the continuous retention of the power centre by social dominant politics through the use of language-text and vocabulary. Critical Linguistics is largely useful to understand how the male-dominated society created the male-female binaries and showed it as a social phenomenon of gender difference through the language.

Man classifies society through his language. The social environment also affects the utility of human language. At one level, society and language affect each other. The vocabulary of their language and customs help us understand how each community explains the environment and its ideas. In order to understand the position of a woman in a particular society and the legends enforced upon her, the language needs to be accessed. The feminists view that gender inequalities continue to occur because of social purport that takes place in the terminology and synergetic relationships within the language system. Changes in the male-dominant language take place when words and concepts in the language are changed.

### **Gender Differences in Language Usage**

Linguists think that there are gender differences in the language structure already in place. So, there exists a difference between the man and woman in handling the current language. Commenting on the language commonly used by women, Robin Lakoff states: "In the language used by women, there is a lack of pressure and frequently asking affirmative questions are found. Excessive use of adjectives and words of respect, inability to use the language fluently and using infinitive sentences are its other characteristics."



To find feminine elements in the language, one must analyse the structure of the language. If the vocabularies, sentence constructions, glossary, grammar, etc., in the language, are not common to both the sexes and has things excessively related to one sex, it is possible to ascertain who constructed that language.

In the case of Tamil, one can find out the differences through birth, culture and grammatical structure cited therein. The classification of attributes of masculinity and femininity based on sex is the basis for the evolvement of a male-dominated culture. Being a man was equated with being heroic, and the one who's born to rule the world. A woman represents gentleness and is expected to be docile. This classification and cultural gender bias have been constructed through the language for ages.

Terminology in both the cases i.e. lack of equivalent feminine terms for masculine words and vice versa, the judgements about a woman are generated in the language mode. No feminine gender terms are available for the following masculine gender terms such as *kavijñar* (poet), *pulavar* (philosopher-poet), *eḷuttāḷaṇ* (writer), *naṇbaṇ* (male friend), *iḷaijñāṇ* (young man), etc. Similarly, no equivalent masculine gender terms are available for the following feminine gender terms which denote the denigrated woman such as *ōḍukāli* (girl/woman of loose morals who runs away from home), *mudirkāṇṇi* (aged spinster), *vāyāḍi* (talkative girl/woman), *kaimpeṇ* (widow), *vibaccāri* (prostitute), etc.

And there are no feminine gender terms in usage equivalent to the masculine gender words such as *vīraṇ* (warrior/champion), *caṇḍiyar* (rogue), *miṇor* (playboy) etc., that justify the rowdiness of male.

Feminine gender abusive terms are relatively more in usage. Example: *muṇḍacci* (widow), *avisāri* (prostitute), *tēvaḍiyāl* (prostitute), *taṭṭuvāṇi* (prostitute), etc.

Along with the cultural-based sex/gender differences, the gender/sex differences mentioned in grammar are also important. In Tamil

grammar, the suffixes accompanying subjects in sentences show sex/gender differences.

Masculine gender suffix – *āṇ*

Feminine gender suffix – *āl*

Human plural suffix – *ār*

Neuter singular suffix – *adu*

Neuter plural suffix – *aṇa*

There is only one suffix that is common for both the masculine and feminine gender of human plural. That common human plural is “*ār*”. The “*ār*”, the human plural common suffix also is rendered to denote a single man (singular) mentioned to be with respect.

Even on the basis of respect, age, etc., a woman is not on par with a man.

*Appā vandār* (Father came)

*Ammā vandāl* (Mother came)

*Vayadāṇa āṇ vīṭṭirkup pōṇār* (Elderly man went home)

*Uṇavu cāppiṭṭār* (He ate the food)

*Vayadāṇa peṇ vīṭṭirkup pōṇāl* (Old woman went home)

*Uṇavu cāppiṭṭāl* (She ate the food)

Here it is not stated as “*vayadāṇa āṇ vīṭṭirkup pōṇāṇ*” (“The elderly man went home”). The masculine gender singular suffix “*āṇ*” is not rendered to a man when he is addressed with respect. Whereas irrespective of age, a woman is mentioned with the feminine gender singular suffix “*āl*”. As culture gives a place to it, the different treatment meted out to women finds a place in the language too. Since men have dominated the language with reference to grammar and culture, the language has leaned in favour of the man.

### ‘Feminine Language’ in Elegies

Each creative work puts forth a societal opinion at some level. The language used in creative works varies from author to author. The

usage of language in creative works changes due to the author's literacy, academic qualification, age, sex, place of living, etc. The utility of language is formed by various social causes. In this backdrop, we shall examine the elegies found in the Sangam literature.

The *puṛam* poems in the Sangam tradition are unique, which projected that relishing land in the exterior landscape and enjoying woman-body in the interior landscape were suited for a man. Tamil Nadu territory was expanding in the period when *iṇakkuḷu* people's life was collapsing and *vēndargaḷ* were emerging through battles. The *vīram* of man was eulogised in the obliteration of *nilam* (land) and *kuḍi* (family/clan/tribe). Since the exterior landscape was assigned as the space of acquaintance for man, the Sangam poems became immensely handy in building up the discourse of projecting the *vīram*. The poems authored by poets from various backgrounds vary according to their societal background. There is a possibility for the manifestation of aspects such as occupation, family, gender difference, etc., in the poem's expression and language structure.

*Tolkāppiyam* mentions seven *turaigaḷ* (situations) when it deliberates on *puṛattiṇai* (exterior landscape genre). In *Puṛapporuḷ Venpāmālai*, a grammatical work belonging to a later period—a separate *tiṇai* (landscape genre) called *karandai* (cattle-retrieving) comprising fourteen *turaigaḷ*—was created. *Kaiyaṟunilai* *turai* (a situation that deals with mourning) is one of these fourteen situations explained in detail. There is a mention in one of the genres of *paṇṇiru puṛattiṇai* (twelve exterior landscape genre) viz. *poduviyal tiṇai* (general landscape genre) that common themes to other *tiṇais* and the themes not found in those *tiṇais* would be dealt with under the *poduviyal tiṇai*. The *kaiyaṟunilai* *turai* has been cited with details in the *poduviyal tiṇai*. The compilers of the later period, who assigned *tiṇai* (landscape genre) and *turai* (situation) details to *Puraṇāṇūru* poems, took *Puṛapporuḷ Venpāmālai* as the basic grammatical treatise for their exercise.

There are 43 poems in *Puranāṇūru* anthology that belonged to *kaiyaṛunilai turai* category. 12 male *pulavar* and 3 female *pulavar* have composed elegies. A total of five elegies—three elegies authored by Avvaiyār (*PNU* 231, 232, 235), one by Pāri Magalir (*Ibid.*, 112) and one by Mārōkkattu Nappacalaiyār (*Ibid.*, 226)—are taken for analysis here.

Only five elegies composed by Kabilar (*Ibid.*, 113), Kuḍavāyil Kīrattaṇār (*Ibid.*, 242), Peruñcittiraṇār (*Ibid.*, 237), Āḍutuṟai Mācāṭṭaṇār (*Ibid.*, 227) and Veḷ Erukilaiyār (*Ibid.*, 233) have been chosen for comparison and analysis with the elegies authored by a female *pulavar*.

The term *kai* as *āgupeyar* (metonymy) refers to its action. Thinking of and mourning for the bereaved person being in the state of helplessness and distress can be termed as *kaiyaṛunilai* (state of being helpless and distressed).

Elegies are sung (i) in memory of heroic man [venerated in the form of *naḍukal* (memorial stone)] who died in the ethnic tribe's battle, (ii) in memory *kurunila maṇṇaṇ* or *vēndaṇ* who died in the war, (iii) in memory of those who died by *vaḍakku iruttal* (sat on fast to death facing towards the north).

In the Sangam poems, we found that the ancient society was transforming from the ethnic community's life of food gathering by hunting and sharing the food collected by communal eating to the society of cattle-rearing and agricultural land expansion. The lifting of an ethnic community's or individuals' cattle was applauded as heroic. Fighting back and retrieving those cattle was also hailed as a heroic act. In memory of the heroes who died in these fights, *naḍukarkaḷ* were erected. The planted stones were adorned with a peacock feather, poured filtered toddy and offered food items. Elegies were composed/sung in memory of those heroes.

In memory of *inaḱkuḷut talaivan* or *kurunila maṇṇaṇ* or *vēndaṇ* died in battles between themselves during the expansion of the terrain, the

elegies were sung by philosopher-poets/bards. Due to the influence of the Jaina religion, Tamil kings and poets had sat on fast to death facing towards the north. Because of such religious practices, elegies were also sung in memory of others who died normally. At present only the elegies authored/sung by woman poets in memory of *kurunila manṇaṇ* or *vēndaṇ* are available. Poems recited in memory of *inaṅkuḷut talaivan* or *kurunila manṇaṇ* or *vēndaṇ* have been taken here for comparative analysis. The differences seen in the bereavement poems penned by both male and female poets are required to be identified for gender studies.

### Central Theme of Elegies

The central theme of the elegies is the grief of loss caused by human death. The grief manifested in the select elegies of Sangam poetry can be defined as follows:

The agony over the demise of *inaṅkuḷut talaivan* or *kurunila manṇaṇ* or *vēndaṇ*, who died in battle/war or in a prolonged illness.

Mourning for the hero, who is being worshipped in the form of *naḍukal* for his chivalrous fight and heroic death in a battle.

Bereaving for the demise of a close friend by observing the *vaḍakku iruttal* (sitting on fast facing towards the North) event, a dignified suicide.

Women, who are capable of engaging in the act of reproduction and offering children to society, are naturally affectionate towards their offspring. The heart of a woman, who waits with her children at home for her husband, is always aware of the pain of loss. Elegies are not sung on the death of a close relative. Though the woman poets authored poems of bereavement socially over the loss of their lord, yet their distress has been accounted for in their poems. In analysing the elegies, we ought to understand the prevailing differences in the bereavement poems on gender orientation.

### The Select Elegies

*arrait tingaḷ avveṇ nilavil*  
*endaiyum uḍaiyēṁ emkunrum pīrarkoḷār*  
*irrait tingaḷ ivveṇ nilavil*  
*veṇreri muraciṇ vēndarem*  
*kunrum koṇḍāryām endaiyum ilamē!*  
*(Puranānūru 112)*

Last month, under that white moon,  
 we had our father,  
 and nobody had seized our mountain.  
 This month, under this white moon,  
 the kings with victory drums have  
 seized our mountain. We don't have  
 our father!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>1</sup>

“Before the *mūvendar* (Cēra, Cōḷa and Pāṇḍiya kings) siege our fortress, we had fun with our father on the full-moon day of the last month. This *parambu* mountain was ours. But today when the moon is shedding bright light in vain, we have lost our father to our enemies. They have even captured our mountain!” The elegy was sung by Pāri Magaḷir, the daughters of the deceased king of a small mountain region while recalling the last full-moon day spent with their father. They simultaneously express their grief over the loss of their father and took over of their mountain by three kings. The *tiṇai* (landscape genre) and *turai* (situation) of the poem are *poduviyal* and *kaiyaṛunilai* respectively.

*cerranru āyiṇum ceyirttanru āyiṇum*  
*urranru āyiṇum uyvinru māḍō*  
*pāḍunar pōlak kaitoḷudu ētti*  
*irandaṇ ṛāgal vēṇḍum polantār*  
*maṇḍamar kaḍakkum tāṇait*  
*tiṇtēr vaḷavaṇ koṇḍa kūṛrē.*  
*(Puranānūru 226)*

If *Kootruvan* had come burning with  
 inner rage or revealing his rage openly,  
 or just touched him, he would have  
 been unable to escape. He must have  
 come with his palms pressed together  
 and praised with respect, like a singer,  
 to take Valavan who wore a gold garland,  
 whose chariots were sturdy, and whose  
 army won victories in harsh battles!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>2</sup>

“*Yamaṇ*, the God of Death, could not have taken the life of the king *Kiḷḷi Vaḷavaṇ*; he either came with deceitful intentions or explicitly with anger, or with the willingness to have a direct face to face fight. The deceased king’s *vīram* and *āṇmai* (manliness) were such that they could be the Gods of Death to the very God of Death. So, the God of Death must have come with folded hands to him like a bard, who desired gifts, and only after adoration, he must have taken his life. How else could, the God of Death have otherwise won the king *Kiḷḷi Vaḷavaṇ*, standing face to face, since he was known for his valour; he who wore a golden garland, an army of winning several battles and a victorious chariot!” This is the elegy sung by a woman poet *Mārōkkattu Nappacalaiyār* on *Cōḷaṇ Kuḷamurrattut Tuñciya Kiḷḷi Vaḷavaṇ*. The *tiṇai* and *turai* of the poem are *poduviyal* and *kaiyaṟunilai* respectively.

*eripuṇak kuṟavaṇ kuṟaiyal aṇṇa*  
*karipura vīragiṇ īma oḷḷaḷal*  
*kurugiṇum kuruguga kuṟugādu cenru,*  
*vicumbura nīliṇum nīlga pacuṇkadirt*  
*tingaḷ aṇṇa veṇkuḍai*  
*jñāyir raṇṇōṇ pugalmā yalavē.*  
 (*Puranāṇūru* 231)

Let it approach his body, the bright flame,  
 from the charred wood pieces with black sides  
 that resemble the wood pieces chopped and  
 burned by a mountain dweller from a land

where trees are burned to clear. If the flame does  
not wish to do that, let it rise and touch the sky.

He was like the glowing sun and his white  
umbrella was like the moon with cool rays.  
His fame will never die!  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>3</sup>

This is the elegy sung by Avvaiyār with bereavement. "The body of the deceased Añci (king of a small mountain region) was put to cremation fire piled up with charred wood tips. The burnt body looked like those mountain-dwellers cut on the burned fields. Let the fire burn his body or let it rise sky high without burning. The glowing sun like his glory, moonlight like his white umbrella, and his pride, valour and triumph will not perish at all." The *tiṇai* and *turai* of the poem are *poduviyal* and *kaiyaṛunilai* respectively.

*illā giyarō kālai mālai*  
*allā giyaryāṇ vāḷum nālē*  
*naḍukal pīli cūṭṭi nārari*  
*cīrukalat tuguppavum koḷvaṇ kollō*  
*kōḍuyar pīrangumalai keḷīya*  
*nāḍuḍaṇ koḍuppavum koḷḷā dōṇē.*  
(*Puranānūru* 232)

Let there be no mornings or evenings!  
Let it be meaningless, the days that I will live!  
His memorial stone is adorned with peacock  
feathers and filtered toddy is poured on it.  
Will he accept them, the man who would not  
accept a mountain country with soaring peaks?  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>4</sup>

"Henceforth, there is no morning? There is no evening? Both are ceased. Hereafter, the living days are not useful but waste (What is the reason? Adiyamāṇ Añci, the one who conversed happily with me from morning to evening, where did he go?). For the deceased Adiyamāṇ Añci, a memorial stone was erected. It was adorned with



peacock feathers. A small vessel full of filtered toddy was poured on it. Pity! Will he accept them? He was the esteemed warrior, who even refused a mountain country with high peaks.” This was an elegy sung by Avvaiyār bewailing over the death of her patron Adiyamān Añci. The poetess wonders whether the philanthropist, who did not wish to get anything from others, would be willing to accept the offering of filtered toddy. The *tiṇai* and *turai* of the poem are *poduviyal* and *kaiyarunilai* respectively.

*cīriyakaḷ perinē emakkīyum manṇē*  
*periyakaḷ perinē*  
*yāmpāḍat tāṇmagiḷḷ duṇṇum manṇē*  
*cīrucōr rāṇum naṇipala kalattaṇ manṇē*  
*perumcōrrā ṇumnaṇipala kalattaṇ manṇē*  
*enpoḍu taḍipaḍu vaḷiyellām emakkīyum manṇē*  
*ampoḍu vēlnulai vaḷiyellām tāṇirkum manṇē*  
*narandam nārum taṅkaiyāl*  
*pulavunārum eṇtalai taivarum manṇē*  
*aruntalai irumpāṇar agaṇmaṇḍait tuḷaiyurī,*  
*irappōr kaiyuḷum pōgip*  
*purappōr puṇkaṇ pāvai cōra*  
*añcolnuṇ tērcip pulavar nāvil*  
*ceṇruvīḷin daṇṇavaṇ*  
*arunirattu iyaṅgiya vēlē*  
*ācāgu endai yāṇḍuḷaṇ kollō*  
*iṇip pāḍunarum illaip pāḍunarkku oṇṇiṅunarum illai*  
*paṇitturaip pagaṇrai naraikkoḷ māmalar*  
*cūḍādu vaigi yāṅgup piṇarkkoṇru*  
*īyādu vīyum uyirtavap palavē.*  
*(Puranāṇūru 235)*

In the past, if he had a little toddy, he would give it to us.  
 Not any longer. If he had abundant toddy, he would  
 give it to us and happily drink the leftover as we sang to  
 him. Not any longer. If he had a little rice, he would set  
 it abundantly on many dishes. Not any longer. If he had  
 heaps of rice, he would set it out abundantly on many dishes.  
 Not any longer. Whenever he came upon bones full of meat,

he would give it to us. Not any longer. Whenever arrows  
and lances crossed the battlefield, he stood there.  
Not any longer. With his hands with orange fragrance, he  
would stroke my hair with its stench of meat. Not any longer.

The spear, before it pierced his precious chest,  
pierced the wide bowls of the outstanding, great bards,  
the hands of those who came to him in need,  
the tongues of poets who were well trained with fine words,  
dimming the pupils in the eyes of dependents,  
and then fell to the earth.

Where is our father who was support to us?  
There are no singers now and there is nobody to gift to singers.  
Like the huge *pakandrai* flowers with honey that grow  
near cold water, but are never worn by anyone, very many lives  
pass away without having given anything to others!  
(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>5</sup>

“He would give us the whole toddy if he has just a little. If he gets abundant toddy, he would share with us and happily drink together, listening to our poetry. If he had a little rice, he would serve it in many bowls. When he had lots of rice, he would serve it in many bowls. When he found bones full of meat, he would give them to us. He would stand wherever arrows and spears crossed on the battlefield to protect us. With his hands with orange scent, he would stroke my hair with its stench of meat. As a spear pierced his chest, bards trembled, their bowls broke, it pierced the hands of those who came in need and the tongues of poets, dimmed the pupils in the eyes of dependents, and then it fell to the earth. Where is our Lord who had been our support? No one would come singing for gifts. There would be no one to give gifts. Like the splendid huge *paganrai* flower with honey that grows near the water port but is left unadorned, many lives pass away without having given anything to others. When there are so many people living in the world without giving anything to others, alas, the philanthropist Adiyamāṇ Neḍumāṇ Añci, who helped everyone always, is no more”. Thus this elegy demonstrates the heart-

wrenching lamentation of Avvaiyār. The *tiṇai* and *tuṟai* of the poem are *poduviyal* and *kaiyaṟunilai* respectively.

*poyyā giyarō poyyā giyarō*  
*pāvaḍi yāṇai paricilark karugāc*  
*cīrkelu nōṇtāl agudaikkaṇ tōṇriya*  
*ponṇunai tikiriyaṇ poyyā giyarō*  
*irumpāṇ okkal talaivaṇ perumpūṇ*  
*pōraḍu tāṇai evvi mārbiṇ*  
*eḷḡuru viḷuppuṇ palaveṇa*  
*vaiguru viḍiyal iyambiya kuralē.*  
*(Puranāṇūru 233)*

Let it be a lie! Let it be a Lie!  
 Let it be a lie like the story about  
 the golden wheel supposedly owned by  
 Akuthai wearing huge ornaments,  
 victorious in deadly battles, leader of  
 bards who come with their many relatives,  
 who gives without limits to those in need,  
 elephants with huge feet.

Let it be a lie, that in the chest of Evvi, on  
 which a big pendant hangs, whose weapons  
 were murderous in war, lord of the bards and  
 their families, there are many good spear  
 wounds, as the voice of dawn, proclaims!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>6</sup>

“Can’t it be a lie? Can’t it be a lie? Can’t it be a lie like the prevailing story regarding the golden wheel supposedly owned by Agudai, the renowned patron known for offering elephants to the bards who came singing for gifts? Can’t it be a lie that Evvi, the mighty lord of bards, who was adept in waging battles, has borne a spear on his chest that there were many wounds, as the voice of early morning proclaims?”. Thus bereaved the poetess Veḷ Erukkilaiyār. The *tiṇai* and *tuṟai* of the poem are *poduviyal* and *kaiyaṟunilai* respectively.

*nīḍuvāl genruyān neḍuṅkaḍai kurugip*  
*pāḍi ninra pacināṭ kaṇṇē*  
*kōḍaik kālattuk koḷuniḷal āgip*  
*poyttal ariyā uravōṇ cevimudal*  
*vittiya paṇuval viḷaindaṇru naṇṇeṇa*  
*nacci irunda nacaipaḷu dāga*  
*aṭṭa kuḷici aḷalpayan dāngu*  
*aḷiyar tāmē yārga veṇṇā*  
*aṇṇil kūrram tīraṇinru tuṇiya*  
*ūḷiṇ uruppa erukkiya magalir*  
*vāḷaip pūviṇ vaḷaimuṇi cidara*  
*muduvāy okkal paricilar irangak*  
*kaḷḷi pōgiya kaḷariyam parantalai*  
*veḷvēḷ viḍalai ceṇrumāyṇ daṇaṇē*  
*āṅgaḍu nōyiṇ rāga ōṅguvaraip*  
*pulipārt torriya kaḷirṇirai pīḷaippin*  
*elipārt torrā dāgum malitiraik*  
*kaḍalmanḍu puṇaliṇ iḷumenac ceṇru*  
*naṇiyuḍaip paricil tarugam*  
*eḷumadi neṇcē tuṇibumun duruttē.*  
*(Puranānūru 237)*

I went to his large courtyard and sang, wishing  
 him a long life, on a day when I was hungry.  
 He was a strong man who could never lie, who was  
 like heavy shade on a hot summer day. When verses  
 were planted in his ears, they were beneficial. Now  
 that desire of mine is ruined and pitiful. It is like an  
 empty pot left on flame!

*Kootruvan* with no sense of fairness, has been brazen  
 and taken him, without caring if those in need are fed.  
 His women beat on their chests and cry according to  
 tradition, their broken bangles scattered like banana  
 flowers. Men with eloquent tongues and their kin grieve.  
 The young warrior with a bright spear has gone to the  
 parched cremation ground. May *Kootruvan* fall ill!

If a tiger stalks and attacks an elephant that escapes,  
 the tiger will not search for a rat to catch. Let us go fast

like muddied river water that rushes into the ocean with  
 huge waves, and win abundant gifts from other kings.  
 Rise up my heart with a clear understanding!  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>7</sup>

“When I reached your huge courtyard with hunger, wishing you a long life, you were like the dense shade in hot summer for us. You were the strong man who never uttered a lie. When you heard my song, it pleased you so much that you heartily appreciated it with lavish gifts. I came to your place with the hope to win gifts, but it is shattered like an empty pot left on flame. The God of Death is so cruel as he took your precious life without thinking of pitiful poor people who are in need of being fed. Your women beat their chest and their bangles are broken and strewn like the flowers of banana flowers. The wise bards with their relatives are grieving. You, the young man with a victorious spear, died now and went to the saline cremation ground full of cactus. May the God of Death who took him away, let him live there without disease. If a tiger stalks and attacks an elephant that survived and escaped, it will not think of searching a rat for food. Likewise, we shall also immediately rush to some other place for getting gifts like the muddied flowing river water that rushes into the ocean with huge waves. Don’t be baffled. Put your effort and stand up boldly now itself.” Though the poet Peruñcittiraṇār, who went to see Iḷaveḷimāṇ, a king of a small region, felt disillusioned, coming to term with practical life, he speaks to his heart to move away rapidly from there to somewhere else to win gifts. The *tiṇai* and *turai* of the poem are *poduviyal* and *kaiyarunilai* respectively.

*iḷaiyōr cūḍār vaḷaiyōr koyyār*  
*nalliyāl maruppiṇ mella vāngip*  
*pāṇaṇ cūḍāṇ pāḍiṇi aṇiyāl*  
*āṇmai tōṇra āḍavar kaḍanda*  
*valvēl cāttan māynda piṇrai*  
*mullaiyum pūttiyō ollaiyūr nāṭṭē.*  
 (Puranāṇūru 242)

Young men do not wear them! Women wearing bangles do not pluck them! The bard does not bend gently with the stem of his *yāzh* to pluck them to wear! The singer does not adorn herself with them! O jasmine vine! Do you still bloom in Ollaiyur, after Sāthan with a strong spear, who prevailed over warriors with his manly strength, died? (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>8</sup>

“Young men do not wear those flowers on their heads. Women wearing bangles do not pluck those flowers. The bard does not bend the tip of his lute nor wear those flowers. And the songstress too does not wear those flowers. Oh *mullai* flower! Why did you bloom in this Ollaiyūr after the death of the mighty valiant Cāttan who had won countless heroic warriors in battles? Who would pluck and wear you?” This is another kind of elegy sung by Kuḍavāyil Kīrattanār over the death of Ollaiyūrkiḷāṇ Magaṇ Peruñcāttan. The *tiṇai* and *turai* of the poem are *poduviyal* and *kaiyarunilai* respectively.

*maṭṭuvāy tirappavum maiviḍai vīlppavum*  
*aṭṭāṇ rāṇāk koḷuntuvai uñcōrum*  
*peṭṭāṇ gīyum peruvaḷam paḷuṇi*  
*naṭṭaṇai maṇṇō muṇṇē iṇiyē*  
*pāri māyndeṇak kalangik kaiyarru*  
*nīrvār kaṇṇēm toḷudunir paḷiccic*  
*cērum vāḷiyō perumpeyarp paraṃbē*  
*kōltiraḷ muṇkaik kuṇuntoḍi magaḷir*  
*nāṇirun kūndal kiḷavaraip paḍarndē.*  
 (Puranāṇūru 113)

In the past, wine jars were opened,  
 male sheep were slaughtered,  
 unlimited rice and fatty meat were  
 cooked together and served,  
 great wealth was bestowed according  
 to the desires of the receivers,  
 and you made me your friend.

Now Pāri is dead, I am confused and  
 helpless, and my tears stream down.  
 I worship and praise you.

I am leaving in search of men for his  
daughters with fragrant, dark hair and  
rounded, thick small bangles on their  
forearms.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>9</sup>

“Oh Parambu mountain! Earlier, we had stomach full of toddy, unlimited food, meat and rice; we were given desired gifts; you were a pleasing friend to us. But with the death of Pāri now, our mind has become baffled and distressed. We worship you; praise you. We are now leaving you in search of suitable men for the deceased Pāri’s daughters with dark hair, and round stacked small bangles on their forearms. Oh Parambu! Long live your fame!” Thus the poet Kabilar, a close friend of Pāri describes his heartache as he was about to leave the Parambu mountain, where he had lived with the deceased and his daughters. The *tiṇai* and *tuṛai* of the poem are also *poduviyal* and *kaiyaṛunilai* respectively.

*naṇipē daiyē nayanil kūrram*  
*viragiṇ maiyiṇ vittat tuṇḍaṇai*  
*iṇṇum kāṇkuvai naṇvāy āgudal*  
*olīruvāl maravarum kaḷiṛum māvim*  
*kurudiyaṇ kurūuppunāl porukaḷat toḷiya*  
*nālum āṇāṇ kaḍan daṭṭenṛuniṇ*  
*vāḍupaci aruttiya vacaiṭṛ āṛṛal*  
*niṇṇōr aṇṇa poṇṇiyal perumpūṇ*  
*vaḷavaṇ eṇṇum vaṇḍumūcu kaṇṇi*  
*iṇaiyōr koṇḍaṇai āyiṇ*  
*iṇiyār marṛuniṇ pacitīṛp pōrē.*  
(*Puranāṇūru* 227)

O *Kootruvan* without mercy! O great fool!  
Since you have no intelligence, you killed and ate  
a seed! You will know the truth in these words!  
Not satisfied with killing daily warriors with  
gleaming swords, elephants, and horses whose  
red blood flows in streams,  
you killed Valavan who wore gold ornaments

and bee-swarming garlands, who was like you.  
 Who do you have now to end your hunger?  
 (Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>10</sup>

“O merciless Yama! You are a fool. You senselessly killed and ate the seed of the paddy itself! You will realise the truth in the coming days. Unsatisfied after killing the warriors with glittering swords, elephants and horses whose blood flowed in battlefields like a wild river, you slew Killi Vaḷavaṇ too, who wore huge gold ornaments and garland with bees swarming. Since you have taken him to your abode, who is here to appease your hunger now?” The bereavement poem authored by Āḍuturai Mācāttanār was delivered when the king Cōḷaṇ Kuḷamurrattut Tuñciya Killi Vaḷavaṇ was killed in a battle. The *tiṇai* and *turai* of the poem are also *poduviyal* and *kaiyarunilai* respectively.

### ***Eccangaḷ* (Infinitives)**

*Eccam*, a grammatical element in Tamil language refers to ‘infinitive’. It is of two kinds, viz. *viṇai eccam* (verbal participle) and *peyar eccam* (relative participle). Of these, the *peyar eccam* had been rendered by several male poets and a few female poets in the poetries.

### **Female Poets – *Peyar Eccam* (Relative Participle)**

Here are a few examples: “*veṇṇeri muracu*” (“beating of the victorious drums”), (*PNU* 112), “*eripuṇak kuṛavaṇ*” (“burning fields’ mountain dwellers”), (*Ibid.*, 231), “*karipura viṛagu*” (“charred wood tips”), (*Ibid.*).

### **Male Poets – *Peyar Eccam* (Relative Participle)**

Here are a few examples: “*naṇṇirun kūṇḍal*” (“fragrant dark hair”), (*PNU* 113), “*nūrvār kaṇ*” (“eyes with tears”), (*Ibid.*), “*kuṇuntoḍi magaliṛ*” (“women with small bangles”), (*Ibid.*), “*vāḍupaci*” (“hunger-starve”), (*Ibid.*, 227), “*naṇṇil kūṛram*” (“God of Death without mercy”), (*Ibid.*), “*ponṇuṇai tigiri*” (“wheels made of gold”), (*Ibid.*, 233), “*aṇṇil kūṛram*” (“God of Death without justice”), (*Ibid.*, 237), “*valvēl cāttan*” (“Cāttan with strong spear”), (*Ibid.*, 242).



### Female Poets – *Viṇai Eccam* (Verbal Participle)

Here are a few examples: “*cirukalattu uguppavum*” (“to be poured on a small vessel”), (PNU 232), “*pīli cūṭṭi*” (“adorned of a peacock feather”), (Ibid.), “*magiṇdu unṇum*” (“to consume happily”), (Ibid., 235), “*pulavu nārūm*” (“stench of meat”), (Ibid.), “*narandam nārūm*” (“fragrance of orange”), (Ibid.), “*talai taivarum*” (“to stroke the head”), (Ibid.).

### Male Poets – *Viṇai Eccam* (Verbal Participle)

Here are a few examples: “*kalangik kaiyarru*” (“baffled with helplessness”), (PNU 113), “*peṭṭāngu iṇum*” (“giving desired gifts”), (Ibid.), “*maṭṭuvāy tirappavum*” (“as opened wine jars”), (Ibid.), “*maiviḍai vīlppavum*” (“slaughter male goats”), (Ibid.), “*kaitoludu ētti*” (“hands joined together and raised with respect”), (Ibid., 226), “*porukaḷattu oḷiya*” (“flow in the battlefield”), (Ibid., 227), “*paricilar iranga*” (“grieving gift-mongers”), (Ibid., 237), “*tiraṇiṇri tuṇiya*” (“without sense but bold”), (Ibid.), “*vaḷaimuri cidara*” (“bangles broken scattered”), (Ibid.).

*Viṇai eccam* has been employed more by many male poets than female poets. This is the same case found with *peyar eccam*.

### *Peyar Aḍaigal* (Adjectives)

The adjective, a grammatical element is a part of a sentence. The usage of adjectives can be regarded as an expression of language disposition. It is worth examining if the term appearing before a noun as an epithet connotes gender difference.

### Female Poets – *Peyar Aḍaigal* (Adjectives)

Here are a few examples: “*ven nilavu*” (“white moon”), (PNU 112), “*arrait tingal*” (“last month”), (Ibid.), “*irrait tingal*” (“this month”), (Ibid.), “*pacuṇkadirt tingal*” (“cool rays moon”), (Ibid., 231), “*venkuḍai*” (“white umbrella”), (Ibid.), “*oṇṇayiru*” (“shining sun”),

(*Ibid.*), “*cīrukalam*” (“small vessel”), (*Ibid.*, 232), “*peruñcōru*” (“lots of rice”), (*Ibid.*, 235), “*irumpāṇar*” (“great bards”), (*Ibid.*), “*paṇitturai*” (“water port”), (*Ibid.*), “*cīriyakaḷ*” (“little toddy”), (*Ibid.*), “*periyakaḷ*” (“abundant toddy”), (*Ibid.*).

### Male Poets – *Peyar Aḍaigaḷ* (Adjectives)

Here are a few examples: “*oḷiruvāḷ*” (“shining sword”), (*Ibid.*, 237), “*polantār*” (“gold garland”), (*Ibid.*, 226), “*tiṇtēr*” (“sturdy chariot”), (*Ibid.*), “*perumpūṇ*” (“huge gold ornaments”), (*Ibid.*, 227, 233), “*vaṇḍumūcu kaṇṇi*” (“garland with bees swarming”), (*Ibid.*, 227).

More female poets than their counterparts have rendered epithets ahead of nouns in their poems.

### *Iḍaiccorkaḷ* (Particles)

Yet another important grammatical element along with verb, noun, adjective, and adverb is *iḍaicol* (particle). Poets employ this grammatical entity in the poetry often to emphasize their point of view by a single syllable or a single term.

### Female Poets – *Iḍaiccorkaḷ* (Particles)

Here are a few examples: “*ilamē*” (“do not have!”), (*PNU* 112), “*kūrre*” (“O God of Death!”), (*Ibid.*, 226), “*mādō*” (*Ibid.*), “*kollō?*” (*Ibid.*, 235), “*maṇṇē*” (*Ibid.*), “*aṇṇa*” (“like”), (*Ibid.*, 231, 235).

In the aforesaid terms, while the last syllables “*ē*” and “*ō*” denote the particle, other terms viz. *mādō*, *kollō*, *maṇṇē* wholly function as particles as they are expletives stressing something specific.

### Male Poets – *Iḍaiccorkaḷ* (Particles)

Here are a few examples: “*paḍarndē*” (“searching for!”), (*PNU* 113), “*maṇṇō*” (*Ibid.*), “*maṇṇē*” (“martial courage!”), (*Ibid.*, 213), “*kuralē*” (“sounds!”), (*Ibid.*, 233), “*neñcē*” (“O heart!”), (*Ibid.*, 237), “*kaṇṇē*” (“at that time!”), (*Ibid.*).

In the aforementioned terms, while the last syllable “ē” denotes the particle, the term viz. *maṇṇō* wholly functions as a particle as it is an expletive stressing something specific.

Relatively female poets employed more particles than their counterparts. It is worth examining if gender has any role to play in such renderings. The “ē” in *ilamē* denotes the bereavement and distress of Pāri Magalīr, the daughters of the deceased king of Parambu mountain.

### Language Structure

While examining the ten elegies of the Sangam poets, the female poets’ language dexterity is distinctive. A particular language structure has repeatedly been featured in the poetry of woman-poets. For instance, in the following poem (*PNU* 112) of Pāri Magalīr, a typical language construction is repeatedly found.

*arrait tingaḷ avveṇ nilavil*

.....

*irrait tingaḷ ivveṇ nilavil*

*emkuṇṇum piṛarkoḷār*

*emkuṇṇum koṇḍār*

Last month, under that white moon,  
we had our father,  
and nobody had seized our mountain.  
This month, under this white moon,  
the kings with victory drums have  
seized our mountain. We don’t have  
our father!

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>11</sup>

When we compare the language construction of these elegies, we cannot find such a language that renders the agony of bereavement as seen in the Pāri Magalīr’s poem in male poets’ poetry. This fact can be further corroborated with the following poem (*PNU* 235) of Avvaiyār.

*cīriyakaḷ perinē emakkīyum maṇṇē*  
*periyakaḷ perinē*  
*yāmpāḍat tāṇmagiḷn duṇṇum maṇṇē*  
*cīrucōr rāṇum naṇipala kalattaṇ maṇṇē*  
*perumcōrrā ṇumnaṇipala kalattaṇ maṇṇē*

In the past, if he had a little toddy, he would give it to us.  
 Not any longer. If he had abundant toddy, he would  
 give it to us and happily drink the leftover as we sang to  
 him. Not any longer. If he had a little rice, he would set  
 it abundantly on many dishes. Not any longer. If he had  
 heaps of rice, he would set it out abundantly on many dishes.  
 Not any longer.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>12</sup>

Thus, in the quoted poem, words have been arranged in binary oppositions. Example: *cīriyakaḷ* (a little toddy) X *periyakaḷ* (abundant toddy), *cīrucōr* (a little rice) X *perumcōr* (heaps of rice). A language structure extolling the greatness of Adiyamāṇ Añci is only found in the poetess Avvaiyār's poetry. And it is to be mentioned that seven stanzas end with the conjunction "*maṇṇē*", an expletive. Such reoccurring of a particular word in one poem is not seen in the poetry of male poets.

Typical particle "*āyiṇum*" (even/if) has appeared thrice in a poem (PNU 226) authored by the poetess Mārōkattu Nappacalaiyār.

*cerraṇru āyiṇum ceyirttaṇru āyiṇum*  
*urraṇru āyiṇum uyviṇru māḍō*

If *Kootruvan* had come burning with  
 inner rage or revealing his rage openly,  
 or just touched him, he would have  
 been unable to escape.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>13</sup>

Rendering of the same linguistic unit repeatedly in the language construction, in a way, is a sign of language deficiency of the poet. Such a norm is not found in the male poets' poetry.

### The Portrayal of Death: Comparison

In *Puṛaṇāṇūru* anthology, we found two poems describing the aftermath of the death of Pāri (king of a small mountain region), wherein the deceased king's daughters and his close friend Kabilar, a poet, were leaving the mountain region in search of a suitable alliance. We can understand the picture of language handling by these poets (both genders), on analysing the poems of Pāri Magaḷir and Kabilar in comparative perspectives.

Kabilar, in his poem, first mentions the greatness of the Parambu mountain. He categorically states as to how it was prosperous when the king was alive that he offered stomach full of toddy, unlimited food with lamb meat and desired gifts. After the death of the king, he lost everything that was available earlier from the mountain. He adds that he was in tears as he was leaving the once-prosperous mountain now in search of suitable bridegrooms for the daughters of the deceased king.

Contrary to the above description of Kabilar, the bereavement of Pāri Magaḷir portrays an altogether different picture of the post-scenario of the death of the king. Pāri's daughters say that they had a happy life with their father on the last month's full-moon day. The Parambu mountain was theirs. But in the present month's full-moon day, their father was no more. And their mountain was seized by other kings.

Kabilar's description of Parambu mountain seems to be a remnant of the *pāṇar* legacy. That is why he illustrates the tragic event splendidly with a lot of adjectives in the poetry which subsequently made the poem a poetic marvel. There are no empty words in the poetry of Pāri Magaḷir. The stanzas of the poem while expressing the agony of bereavement openly, very delicately vents out the pain of the death. While analysing their poems from comparative perspectives, the poem of Pāri Magaḷir has emerged as a summit poetical piece of tragedy. By evoking the feeling of distress through reading, the Pāri Magaḷir's poem is unique in sketching the greatness of the king Pāri and his prosperous Parambu mountain of the bygone era.

The following stanzas of the poem (*PNU* 235) by Avvaiyār are 'language of body-centric'.

*narandam nārum taṅkaiyāl*  
*pulavunārum eṇtalai taivarum maṇṇē*

..... With his hands with orange fragrance, he  
would stroke my hair with its stench of meat. Not any longer.

(Tr.: Vaidehi Herbert)<sup>14</sup>

Generally, the male poets used to describe their friendship/relationship with *inakkulut talaivar* or *kuṇunila maṇṇar*. The description of poetess Avvaiyār, which mentions that the king Adiyamāṇ had stroked the poetess's head, can only be described by a woman poet. In this respect, Avvaiyār's poem is unique.

As language is a product of socialization, dissimilarities of caste, religion, sex, etc., tend to dominate in the construction and usage of language. In the Tamil society, where suppressed value judgements prevailed on the basis of gender, the judgement on women was only secondary. Under such circumstances, the language of female authors in literary creation has distinctive hallmarks. Against this framework of hypothesis, the language structure of the elegies of Sangam poems has been taken up for analysis. Only five female poets' five elegies and five elegies of male poets have been analysed to know the language dexterity of each gender. When the whole corpus of the Sangam poems is analysed, some of the points established in this research article may lose relevance. In a milieu where masculinity-femininity difference based on physical appearance/body strongly prevailed in the society, the gender identity evidently manifested itself in the literary creative works. In this framework, it is possible to define, this is what the "*peṇmoli*" ("feminine language") is.

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### Notes

1. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
2. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
3. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
4. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
5. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
6. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
7. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
8. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
9. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
10. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
11. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-1-200/>
12. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
13. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>
14. <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-purananuru-201-400/>

## Is Tirukkuraḷ a Universal Scripture? Some Discourses

No Tamil poet commands the honour as Tiruvalluvar does. It is in recognition of his great didactic work namely *Tirukkuraḷ*. Valluvar has a huge statue scaling 133 feet in Kumarimuṇai (Kaṇṇiyākumari). The *Tirukkuraḷ*, a post-Sangam work has in many ways continued to be influential in Tamil. Although it had no significance during the Bhakti Movement era (c. 600-900 CE), it was very well received in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the milieu of *Tēvāram* and *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*, *Purāṇas* considered as works of literature, the cadres of Dravidian Movement projected *Tirukkuraḷ* as an antidote against them and thereby they established a new discourse. The rational ideas of *Tirukkuraḷ* against the faith in God have gained prominence in Tamil Nadu. In due course of time, *Tirukkuraḷ* was hailed as *Tamiḷ Maṛai* (Tamil Veda) or *Vedam*. With no explicit religious signs but with secularistic visions, the *Tirukkuraḷ* has immensely attracted the people who had the agenda of social reform.

To counteract the propaganda of Vedic Hindu religious ethos hailing *Sanskritam* (> Sanskrit) as the *Deva Bhāsha* (Language of Gods) at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Tirukkuraḷ* has become very handy to demonstrate the supremacy of Tamil. Since the 1950s, the *Tirukkuraḷ* has become a complimentary item to be gifted at weddings.



*aṇbum araṇum uḍaittāyin ilvāḷkkai*  
*paṇbum payaṇum adu*  
 (Tirukkuraḷ 45)

If love and virtue in the household reign,  
 this is of life the perfect grace and gain.  
 (Tr.: G.U. Pope 2003: 9)

The above quoted couplet has become a part of most wedding invitation cards and is printed on their tops since the 1950s. From primary school to higher education, the *Tirukkuraḷ* has mandatorily found its place in Tamil pedagogies. Having inscribed on Tamil Nadu buses since the 1970s, the *Tirukkuraḷ* has become etched in the minds of the public, even the less educated ones. It ought to be mentioned here that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is the most translated literary work from Tamil to the world languages. Recognised as the hallmark of Tamils now, the influence of *Tirukkuraḷ* has been deeply rooted in the lives of Tamils.

With the declaration of Tamil as a classical language, the voices had already been in an uproar to declare the *Tirukkuraḷ* as the “National Book of India”. On the other side, the motion to declare the *Tirukkuraḷ* as a “Universal Scripture” has been intensified. The *Tirukkuraḷ*, a book that taught morality or ethics among Tamils, is venerated by Tamil scholars more than any other book. The notion that every moral thought has the aptness to elevate human beings prevails as a public consciousness among Tamils. Notably, such developments have the backdrop of micropolitics.

Tamil identity faces major challenges due to Globalization and the expansion of Communication networks. The life of Tamils and the existence of Tamil now landed into more problems than ever before. Given the tremendous growth that took place in Science and Technology, it is also critical for the Tamil Language to transform itself accordingly. With the spread of Tamils all over the world, it is an immediate requirement to recognise Tamil as one of the global languages. However, the effort of propagating the rhetoric that

“*Tirukkuraḷ* is a Universal Scripture” is underway intensely. In this scenario, it is imperative to identify what are those manners that human beings need to adhere to and what are the notions of Valluvar who rendered those conceptions in the verse form and their place in the modern Tamil society. When we comprehend the relationship between the modern man and the *Tirukkuraḷ* text, there is a possibility for the emergence of new discourses.

In the Sangam era, diverse ethnic tribes expressed their harmonious as well as conflicting identities in Tamil Nadu. During this period, conceptions such as family and state were emerging strongly. There existed the family system of men and women living together. At the same time, the women who were the remnants of the matrilineal society lived independently on par with men without getting into the family system. Killing enemy, eating meat, drinking toddy, robbery, cattle-lifting, and men and women having sex before formal marriage if they liked each other, etc., were ordinarily in practice. In the day-to-day life filled with revelries, nobody cared to listen to the philosophical teachings. Hence, no corpus of ethical codes or compendium of moral thoughts was authored during the Sangam period.

With the advent of Buddhist and Jaina monks in Tamil Nadu, a number of changes took place in the everyday life of Tamils. The caste hierarchy schemed by Vedic Hinduism got strengthened in the society. The Jainism, which recognized agriculture and trade, justified the prevailing economic inequalities among the people through the *viṇaika kōṭpāḍu* (Theory of *Karma*). The heterodox faith was primarily taught to not kill others. Buddhism stressed the following principles of *pañca sheel* (Five Tenets) as virtues: Not killing, not stealing, not lying, not committing adultery and not consuming alcohol. There were countless disputes, conflicts and killings that took place among the religions in the act of propagation of their respective faiths. In this context, the word *aṛam* (virtue) denoting the meaning of morality

emerged. Hence, most of the *arangaḷ* (virtues) were religious by nature. These religions, which critically approached the merriments of the Sangam epoch, began to teach people a different set of ethics. The monks who tried to propagate the teachings of Buddha and the saints who propagated the doctrines of Mahavīra formed the background for the emergence of *arangaḷ*. There must have been several didactic works authored in Tamil at that time. The past milieu of Tamil Nadu roughly dated back to 1700 years, the moralities centred on the life of Tamils fashioned by Tiruvaḷḷuvar were formed in the treatise called *Tirukkuraḷ*. A prevalent custom among the *pandits* was to accept them without any question. What was once considered natural, was later discredited as ethical defilement, and what was once considered moral debauchery, in due course of time, was accredited as normal behaviour. As socio-economic conditions changed, so did values. By forming the thought about crime in the human's psyche and creating the change of opinion about what was once believed to be right, new and new bases are formed over the years. In such a situation, an individual's morality and societal morality were considered sacred. If we deconstruct such sacred moralities/ethical codes, we can perceive the voice of authority subtly embedded within them. Hence, no didactic work as such is sacred. The didactic works are not authored without any predilections. In this context, it is a sign to ask how far the moral precepts preached by *Tirukkuraḷ* resonate with the life of Tamils today. It is not blasphemous to *Tirukkuraḷ* in any way that the ethical precepts pronounced by the didactic treatise are not applicable for all the times in its entirety; this is the reality. When religions, supposedly established by God themselves change their positions according to the need of the hour, it is inevitable that the occurrence of contradictions and changes in the conceptions of didactic works. For example, the well-known Biblical conception that "The world is flat" is not accepted by Christians today. But some people in Tamil Nadu blindly believe that the ethical notions of *Tirukkuraḷ* are irrevocable; *dēva vākkiam* (celestials' utterance). This attitude is not acceptable.

Tiruvalluvar, an advocate of Jaina religion, has chronicled the virtues in 1330 couplets, which are supposed to be followed by people in their day-to-day life. Orally transmitted legends about his personal life raised him to the status of God. Hailing him as *oppaṛra jñāni* (unparalleled wise man), *māperum dīrghadarishi* (great prophet), *deyvap pulavar* (saintly poet) and *ayyaṇ* (Lord) has become a popular trend now. Venerations offered to Tiruvalluvar on the equal pedestal to God, can be in some sense a problem for *Tirukkuraḷ*. Hailing *Tirukkuraḷ* as *Veda Nūl* (Vedic Text) and making it as a piece of *pūja*, will prevent people from reading the didactic treatise. When we approach the *Tirukkuraḷ* in the perspective of “the philosophy which is impractical is barren”, will the average human beings be able to follow the principles that *Tirukkuraḷ* advocated? This remains an important question here.

For the last 1700 years, the *Tirukkuraḷ* has been preaching significant virtues to the Tamil people by highlighting the values and greatness of life. To some extent, the *Tirukkuraḷ* has entered into the ideological attitude of even the lesser-educated Tamils. But today the majority of Tamils have become addicted to culturally bad Tamil films. Tamil people are continuously electing the gaudily dressed actors, ingenuine politicians and corrupt people as their leaders. Untouchability still exists due to the violence of the dominant caste people in villages. Treating woman as an object of sexual enjoyment and exercising violence over her are continuing in society due to the existence of gender inequality. In this scenario, a question arises, “Why did the virtues taught by *Tirukkuraḷ* fail to regulate the minds and life of Tamils?”

The ethical notions mentioned by Tiruvalluvar in the chapter “Pulāl Maruttal” (“Abstaining from Eating Meat”) are for intense scrutiny. Eating is associated with social life. Fish and meat are the mainstays of the Eskimo’s diet, who live in the polar region where the snow is frozen throughout the year. The humans, who lived in the natural environment gained knowledge about food from their ancestors. The

fish or dry fish definitely finds its place in the daily diet of fishermen living along the coast of Tamil Nadu. The Christian Bible says that the Lord had created other creatures in the world for mankind's consumption. The Quran of Islam states that the body of the animal that was killed after chanting "halal" shall be cooked and consumed. Under such circumstances, there is no possibility of people from other religions to accept the Jaina and Buddhist religions' notions, especially the one that states, "No one should kill ever any being". Most Tamils who have been eating meat since the Sangam period did not accept Tiruvaḷḷuvar's advice of abstaining from eating meat. The vivacious village deities such as Māḍaṇ, Icakki, Pāṇḍi, Muṇi, Kāli, etc., are worshipped with animal sacrifice. There is no place for such a notion in the lives of Tamils filled with folk deities and family deities. But Tiruvaḷḷuvar condemned the people who kill animals and birds for eating as *pulaiyar* (base people). He also discredited the cut of butchering as *pun* (sore). While imposing the religious tenets of Jainism on Tamil people in the name of morality, reprimanding them as *pulaiyar* is inappropriate for consuming the meat.

When the majority of Tamils disagreed with the moral precepts emphasized in the chapter "Pulāl Maṟuttal", it is contradictory to state that "*Tirukkuraḷ* has notions that are acceptable to all Tamil people". In such a scenario, it is impracticable to teach the virtue to the Europeans and Americans that they should not eat meat while the meat is their daily staple food.

The voice of Vaḷḷuvar, insisting not to consume alcohol, is also to be criticised. People have been generally drinking boozes for centuries. Further, there is no place for the following clarion call, "No alcohol" in the Western countries, which insist on the freedom of individuals. The ethical notion of *Tirukkuraḷ* tagging the consumption of alcohol as a crime is at odds with the modern lifestyle. Can we recommend the virtues of *Tirukkuraḷ* which harshly condemns eating meat and drinking booze to the people of the world? This is an important question to be answered. In such a milieu, we have to introduce

the *Tirukkuraḷ* after removing certain outdated couplets which are untenable to modern time's life. However, removing some couplets from the *Tirukkuraḷ* shall be deemed as a betrayal to Tiruvaḷḷuvar.

There is a strong belief among Tamils that “The *Tirukkuraḷ* is a text with no gender bias. It stresses the chastity for man and woman alike; it puts forth the moral precepts in favour of oppressed women”. Tamil scholars used to bless women by saying that “A Tamil-woman will prosper in her life if she adheres to the path of *Tirukkuraḷ*”. But feminists have been severely critical of Tiruvaḷḷuvar's assessment of women. The notions projected under the chapter “Peṇvaḷic Cēral” (“Being Led by Women”) are meant for intense scrutiny. Tiruvaḷḷuvar strongly condemned a man who acts as per a woman's terms, fulfil a woman's demand, and bows down to a woman. “A man who shares his opinions with a woman cannot perform virtuous activities. He cannot do any good to his birth; he will lose the performing skill”. The attitude of denying a woman's intellect and power is seen in *Tirukkuraḷ*. Male-centric attitude has been deeply embedded in Tiruvaḷḷuvar's tone. “Don't listen to a woman's words”. Thus Tiruvaḷḷuvar put forth a conception as a virtue in addition to denying the woman's existence in society and ignoring her mind as well. In Vaḷḷuvar's time, the woman too had an interest in multiple sexual intercourse relationships like a man. Some women did not live bound by the marriage system. Some women desired wealth but there is no reference about the women who desired men for material gains. Tiruvaḷḷuvar's insistence on the status of one-on-one in the family system is a progressive aspect of the period. “One woman for one man” – a virtue insisted by Tiruvaḷḷuvar as his personal stand to the family establishment was a progressive aspect of the said period. Vaḷḷuvar, who highlighted the women who self-guarded the purity of their chastity, did not care about men who ought to guard the same. Relatively, he had offered generously a lot of advice to women.

The advice of Tiruvaḷḷuvar rendered under the chapter “Piraṇ Ḽ Viḷaiyāmai” (“Not Coveting Another's Wife”) needs to be understood

with reference to men. In the context of projecting a small family of husband and wife, the sexual ethic uttered by Vaḷḷuvar has been aimed fully at a woman. The idealistic virtue of individual discipline also has the characteristics of a man's authority over a woman. Every move and action of man as depicted by Vaḷḷuvar revolved around his authority over the woman. Through the discourse on chastity, the didactic works attempted to remould the woman's mind dominated by her husband by safeguarding her body from falling prey to other men and processing it to be pure and ready for the husband's domination forever. The *Tirukkuraḷ* is also not an exemption to this standpoint.

Vaḷḷuvar's view on man-woman sexual relationship has been minutely illustrated in "Kāmattuppāl" ("Part on Love"), the third section of the *Tirukkuraḷ*. The "Kāmattuppāl" is authored entirely in the 'male language'; there is absolutely no place for the 'female language' in it. The following couplet is related to the issues of male-centric.

*kaṇḍukēṭṭu uṇḍuyirttu urrariyum aimpulaṇum*  
*oṇṭoḍi kaṇṇē uḷa*  
 (Tirukkuraḷ 1101)

The (simultaneous) enjoyment of the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch can only be found with bright braceleted (woman).

(Tr.: Rev. W.H. Drew and Rev. John Lazarus 1989: 223)

The above quoted couplet only highlights the man's sexual desire. Vaḷḷuvar is least bothered about the woman fulfilling her sexual desire or giving up on it. In the milieu of approach, "the woman is the object to be understood and enjoyed by the man", the sexual passion is distorted as the technical know-how of the man. Such a male-centred view was the basis for all kinds of sexual transgression and violence. On one hand, Tiruvaḷḷuvar transforms the woman's body as an object and as a base for sexual enjoyment, and on the other hand, he gives power to the man to claim the woman's body in the name of virtue. By positioning the woman in the front with the identity of *kādali* (lover)

or *maṇaivi* (wife), the “Kāmattuppāl”, which proposes merriments of sex, in a sense, is the manifestation of the lord-slave relationship. Until the woman fully surrenders her body to the man, keeps quiet and stops talking, the poetic embellishments will overflow.

*deyvam toḷāal koḷunar toḷudeḷuvāḷ*  
*peyyeṇap peyyum maḷai*  
*(Tirukkuraḷ 55)*

Even the rains will fall at her command  
 Who upon rising worships not God, but her husband.  
 (Tr.: Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami 2000: 31)

Though the above quoted couplet honours the woman in the name of chastity, it unnecessarily puts the burden on the wife. The construction of *Tirukkuraḷ* which portrays a woman with fictional characteristics of possessing a pure body and chaste heart who worships her husband is questionable. Feminists criticise Tiruvaḷḷuvar for not being concerned for the man as husband worshipping of his wife and commanding the rains to pour on the world. The image of a woman created by Vaḷḷuvar, who lived many centuries ago, is refuted by modern Tamil women.

Today, women are serving at the highest positions as Prime Minister, Chief Minister, District Collector, Supreme Court Justice, Police Chief, big businesswomen and so on. In this scenario, if men serving under women abide by the ethics advocated by Vaḷḷuvar, “Don’t listen to a woman’s words”, then that action will be deemed against law, conflicting with the constitution laid down by the Indian Constitutional Council. So, some of the ethics stressed by Tiruvaḷḷuvar for women are not relevant anymore. Can we recommend the virtues to the women of the world, which are not indeed even applicable to the Tamil women?

The virtues advocated by Vaḷḷuvar to people living socially are noteworthy to make them live harmoniously. In that respect, Vaḷḷuvar’s personality is simple; he appears to be an average man.



While mentioning the importance of education, he refers conflictingly to the necessity of education. “In the unlearned face, there are no eyes; they are sores” (*TKL* 393). Further, he admonishes “The unlearned as animals” (*Ibid.*, 410). The aspiration of unlearned to speak in front of the learners is like “A breastless woman’s longing for sex” (*Ibid.*, 402), thus he rebukes the unlearned. He angrily questions, “What does it matter whether those men live or die, who can judge of tastes by the mouth, and not by the ear?” (*Ibid.*, 420). In the scenario of Tamil Nadu, where prevails the *Sanātana Dharma* for ages that education is only for the upper castes, Vaḷḷuvar, through his moral maxims, tried to create an effect in the consciousness of the average man of saturated.

The following pronouncement of Vaḷḷuvar is not accidental, “They, who have fallen from their (high) position, are like the hair which has fallen from the head” (*Ibid.*, 964), as the Universal versifier criticised the people of certain characteristics elsewhere in other couplets as “The body of loveless people is a mere frame of bones covered with skin” (*Ibid.*, 80), “The eyes of the men without benign look are only sores” (*Ibid.*, 575), “Men without benign look remain just like trees rooted of the ground” (*Ibid.*, 576). In the absence of the definition of the term *māṇam*, the recent statement of the Secretary of a Political Party needs to be compared. When some senior leaders broke away from that political party, he referred to them as “fallen hair”. One can adhere to the requisite ethics from the social virtues put forth by Tiruvaḷḷuvar for his/her modern life. It is not a wonder that Vaḷḷuvar’s attempted to convey a concept through the simple illustration of a climber of a tree, trying to climb further, will eventually lead to its fall. The *Tirukkuraḷ* can offer clarity of the mind for those who regularly read it but suddenly encounter problems in their lives. Its stanzas such as “*nīriṇri amaiyādu ulagu*” (“No life on Earth can exist without water”), (*Ibid.*, 20), “*uyvillai ceynaṇri konra magarku*” (“There is no redemption for those who let gratitude die”), (*Ibid.*, 110), “*aḍakkam amararuḷ uykkum*” (“Self-control will place one among the Gods”), (*Ibid.*, 121), “*karka kacaḍarak karpavai*” (“All that you learn, learn

perfectly”), (*Ibid.*, 391) kindle thoughts in our minds. Only because of this kind of stanzas, *Tirukkuraḷ* has been continuously commanding its rule in the minds of the Tamil people.

The weak point of the *Tirukkuraḷ* scripture is that it tried to express the same virtue in ten couplets in every chapter. Because of the compulsion that the same virtue has to be illustrated in ten couplets on a particular topic, a number of ordinary couplets have found the place in *Tirukkuraḷ* text. And in every chapter, the tone of the sheer importance of that given chapter than others is expressed in the composition of couplets. Because of this, several couplets have not emerged as poetic pieces but as verses comprehending the perception in dried up style. When the *Tirukkuraḷ* is compared overall with the Sangam poems with amazing poetic richness and literary excellence, the poetic aspects of the couplets are very little.

In the voice of Vaḷḷuvar,

*piṛappokum ellā uyirkkum ciṛappovvā*  
*ceytoḷil vērrumai yān*  
 (*Tirukkuraḷ* 972)

All men who live are alike at birth.  
 Diverse actions define their distinction and distinctiveness  
 (Tr.: Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami 2000: 427)

Thus, the construction of Vedic Hinduism’s caste inequality and rejection of untouchability have been strongly established. With such couplets, many conclude that Vaḷḷuvar was against the *Sanātana Dharma*’s treatment. When we read the entire corpus of couplets collectively, we perceive the conflicting notions.

There is a contradiction in the claim that the *Tirukkuraḷ* is a non-religious ethical work. There are a good number of couplets that show the Tiruvaḷḷuvar’s acceptance and his stand in favour of the Vedic thoughts such as faith in God, idolatry, *yagñā*, faith in rebirth, fate, heaven, hell, salvation, goodness, wickedness, etc. In the binary

opposition of upper-class X lower-class, Tiruvalluvar says that a person who was born in lower-class can become an upper-class by his/her good deeds. By examining this couplet, one may perceive that there is absolutely no denial or condemnation of the inequality, which was constructed upon one's birth between *kuḍi* (family/community/clan) or *jātis* (castes).

The important question is that how far do the ethical notions of the *Tirukkuraḷ*—scripted for asserting the supremacy of political authority and maintaining the dominance of religions—be implemented today? The need for *Tirukkuraḷ* ought to be assessed in the present-day context. If it is the aim to propagate the ethical notions of *Tirukkuraḷ* widely among the public, a plan has to be devised accordingly. Only by critical reviewing of the moral notions of *Tirukkuraḷ*, whether they fit or conflict with the changing scenario of societal environs, the maxims of truth will be of contemporary value. This could be the way the didactic treatise may continue for the good of the public. Appreciation of *Tirukkuraḷ* as a sacred text meant for all time will isolate the public scripture from people.

With the identity of Tamils, there are people of different castes, divergent religions and atheists living in different countries all over the world. The culture of Tamils living all over the world with different customs and faiths is not homogeneous. Only by recognising the existence of diverse fashions/styles/stances, the identity of Tamils has been strengthened. In this scenario, stressing on *Tirukkuraḷ*, which consists of conflicting views on meat-eating and assessment over woman, as *Tamiḷar Vedam* (Tamils' Veda) will create conflicts among Tamil people. Eight crore Tamils cannot adhere to the same virtues. In the context of various languages and ethnic tribes living in India with different cultural identities, the opinion of some people that *Tirukkuraḷ*, which teaches ancient virtues, should be declared as the national book of India, is purely their personal choice, but that is not practical. In this milieu, the *Tirukkuraḷ* has flexible notions

for different people in the world who speak thousands of languages. Therefore, there exist contradictions in the idea of “*Tirukkural Ulagap Podumaṟai*” (“*Tirukkural* – The Universal Scripture”). In general, the conception of “*Ulagap Podumaṟai*” itself is like a mirage; the highpoint of *pandits*’ rhetoric. The truth is that there is no possibility of such a book.

Tiruvalluvar’s act of chronicling appropriate ethical principles that man should live up to candidly places him on a higher pedestal as the man of achievement. The ethical notions of *Tirukkural* have tried to regulate Tamils in every period. They have established a philosophical background to Tamils’ life. The honour to *Tirukkural* is that relationship between the Tamils and the *Tirukkural* is very deep and that is inseparable. It is *Tirukkural*’s honour that its relationship with Tamils is so deep and inseparable. Shallow tributes of rhetoric without critical reviews are not needed for *Tirukkural* or *Tirukkural* is not bound to shallow tributes of rhetoric without critical reviews. Therefore, it is not a matter of honour decking him with roles that are incompatible with the character of Tiruvalluvar, the best ancient social thinker of the Tamil community. The reality is that the *Tirukkural*, the text on virtue, will sustain in the future too, by its innate strength.

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## Assessment of Paḍiṇeṇ Kīlkkāṇakku Texts on Woman

In the Sangam era where the life of ethnic tribes was given prominence, the identity of Tamil integrated the vast territory. In the post-Sangam period, the Jainism, Buddhism and Vedic religions had a huge influence on the life of Tamils. As a result, there emerged changes in ideologies. The revelries of the Sangam era were overlooked for being allegedly contemptuous. Drinking toddy, eating meat and having sex outside of marriage were considered serious social offences. By the precepts of Vedic religion, the situation dividing people as high and low had emerged. The social system became taut and the authority of the rulers grew stronger at every level. Hence, ethical codes were charted for human beings to live morally. There was a need to propagate ethical ideas among the masses for the constant prevalence of the religions' supremacy along with the common discipline thoughts. Several didactic works beginning with *Tirukkuraḷ* have been composed after 200 CE. The ethical works that gave priority to the Jainism, Buddhism and Vedic religions' precepts were later known as “Paḍiṇeṇ Kīlkkāṇakku Nūlgaḷ” (“The Post-Eighteen Works”). Of these, only the following ten texts have been taken for analysis in this article: *Mudumolikkāñci* (MMK), *Nālaḍiyār* (NAR), *Tirukkuraḷ* (TKL), *Inṇā Nārpadu*, *Iniyavai Nārpadu*, *Nāṇmaṇikkaḍigai* (NMK), *Cirupaṇcamūlam* (CPM), *Ēlādi*, *Tirikaḍugam* (TKM) and *Ācārakkōvai* (AK).

When conflicts between the rulers and subjects worsened in the society of the past, where the ownership of wealth was much in vogue, the didactic works were then penned to justify the existence of the majority of people. The moral precepts help the economically weaker section and the caste-oppressed people to make themselves feel content and brainwashed them to accept it as their destiny. The didactic works also justify the oppression of women that prevails on gender inequalities. However, the ethical treatises also put forth the conceptual background wherein people lived harmoniously with each other. The teachings of the didactic works try to shape society as a single entity. But it is questionable whether people follow them in their practical lives.

Ethical thoughts were neither sent by/coming from a supernatural power, nor were a result of any super miracle, nor either originated in the brain of an individual man. The notion that we come across in any didactic work, in fact, is not wholly the intellectual property of a single author but of the societal collective. The author usually formulates certain customs to a particular linguistic community after thorough observation. When ancestors' experiences, traditional ideas, knowledge gained through experiences and the religions' dominance are infused together, an ethical work assumes an edifice. Generally, the *aṛam* (virtue) or *nīdi* < *nīti* (Skt.), (ethics/morality) preached by a didactic work is subject to change now and then. Hence, it is not a statute that remains unchanged forever. It is quite natural that the proper way of life customs and behaviour which appear appropriate for a period of time would later become irrelevant in the changed new era. In the case of Tamil, some people propagate that the didactic work *Tirukkuraḷ* is a *Veda Nūl* (Book of Scripture) and is absolutely relevant for all ages. But this is not agreeable. In the context of the post-modernist reading where all kinds of holiness and sanctities, and images are razed down, the ethical works are no exception either. The ethical treatises stressed that people should adhere to the various images of women chronicled in their discourses. When the

post-Sangam eighteen works were read from a feminist perspective, the orthodox assessment of the woman was highlighted. From this, it is possible to revive the post-Sangam ancient Tamil's conception of woman and to formulate a deeper critique of the same.

All the post-Sangam eighteen didactic works were authored only by men versifiers. The state of affairs of the Sangam era, wherein 41 female poets composed enormous poems, have changed during the epoch of ethical works. It was restricted that the woman should carry out everything by fully depending on the man and the home is the domain of her frequented space. And the woman was taught that these are her ethics and besides taking care of the interest of her husband, relatives and guests, she was duty-bound to bear and rear children. By confining the woman to rattle within the family frontier, the didactic treatises constantly stressed her to live with a trait called "chastity". Rebuffing the independent existence of the woman in the Sangam era, the ethical works openly tried to obliterate her identity.

The chapter titled "Peṇvaḷic Cēral" ("Being Led by Women") in *Tirukkuraḷ* has revealed the worth of a woman in the bygone society. Vaḷḷuvar, who stated, "Men should not listen to the words of the woman", subsequently cautions that no benefits will be gained, the paradise won't be achieved, fear will crop up for rendering the good deed and will not be possible to perform any charitable deed. Following Tiruvaḷḷuvar, other didactic works' authors have also denounced the behaviour of being led by women. "One who does not believe that the women's words are factual will be the one who will be blessed with the things stated in the good books", thus says *Ēlādi* (verse 5). Merely as the extension of the notion that "Because of women, evils only largely occur", the idea of "Peṇvaḷic Cēral" has been inscribed in the didactic treatises of later period.

The woman sketched by the eleven didactic works reads that she does not have the ability to function independently, does not have any right over her body; living with the attribute of chastity is her



greatness. In ethical works, women have been generally classified into two categories such as the domestic/family women and prostitutes. The didactic works, which are freely dictating virtues only to family women, present only the ugliest portrait of prostitutes. These treatises eventually caution the menfolk that the prostitutes besides coveting men's wealth are very capable of faking. In the era when sexual relationships outside the family were very common, the ethical texts with concern asked the men to stay away from such an activity. There existed significantly a great number of women as remnants of the matrilineal society, living independently without joining the institution called "family" during the said period. Such women had sexual relationships with the men whom they liked and lived on their own terms. The men also engaged in unprincipled sexual relationships. It is difficult to stop them. Hence, the virtue suggested for men by Peruvāyiṉ Muḷḷiyār, "Don't stay with the mother or daughter or sister in the bed when she is alone" (*ĀK* 65) is really shocking. "Men did not leave even the girls who had not attained puberty, the women who had hit menopause, nuns and others (*CPM* 42). Hence, the ethical codes preached by the didactic works aiming at streamlining the unregulated sexual relationships seemed to be the expression of *Āṇ Maiyavādam* (Male-centrism).

The image projected by the ethical works, regarding the implication of the woman's body is important in the assessment of women. A Jaina monk rebukes, "The men those who hail the teeth of the woman are stupid as they compare the teeth of woman to the buds of jasmine and pearls" (*NAR* 45). Another monk categorically says, "The woman is the mixed entity of intestine, bones, nerves, flesh and blood" (*Ibid.*, 46). Yet another monk remarks, "The woman who has sharp eyes resembling spears, will be later walking with the support of sticks in her old age" (*Ibid.*, 17). In the perception of assessing the women—who are an equal half of the total population—as merely the consolidation of organs or simply as the body of the physical frame, the societal existence of the woman is denied. By limiting

the common sexual desire of the men and women that arise in their adulthood only to the former, the didactic works assess the woman's body as a mere object of sexual pleasure. It is no wonder the woman remains a mystery to the men who do not live simply within the family institution, but who convert all women's bodies for the requirement of sex. Such sermons are nothing but the outcomes of not actually knowing the preciousness of a woman's mind and the magnitude of her love, but accessing her merely as a physical body.

The fine qualities of a good woman as uttered by the ethical texts are needed to be deeply analysed. However, no ethical work as such has any concern to define the qualities of a good man. "A good-mannered woman stands on the borderline of shyness" (*NMK* 30). "Bashfulness is the beauty to the woman" (*Ibid.*, 11). "A good woman conducts herself to the whims of her husband" (*CPM* 51). "A good woman conducts herself to the thinking of her husband" (*TKM* 36). "The disobedient woman is like a disease to her husband" (*CPM* 62). "The sober-tongued woman is like an object to be protected" (*TKM* 47). Thus, the trend of denying the distinctiveness of the woman had manifested in the perceptions of the didactic works that formulated shyness, being obedient to her husband and conducting herself to the thinking of her spouse, as the desired qualities of womanhood. When the woman started living independently according to the flawless outcomes that emerged out of her prowess of self-thinking, the ethical treatises blame her as the disease to her spouse, besides condemning her as the disobedient woman of her husband.

In the familial life wherein the man and the woman live together, the didactic books liberally offer a lot of advice only to the woman. It is emphasized that the woman, the centre of the family institution, is the person who does not look at other men and as the lady of chastity. Based on this only, "No one should desire of other's wife", a piece of prevailing advice is offered. "The fear emerging out of desiring the other's wife is very horrible" (*NAR* 27). "The one who desires the wife of other will be born as a eunuch in the next birth" (*Ibid.*, 85).

“The one who excels in the life, will not desire other’s wife” (*Ēlādi* 74). “What is called *pērāṇmai* (great manliness) is not desiring of other’s wife” (*Iniyavai Nārpadu* 15). “Desiring other’s wife will give distress” (*Inṇā Nārpadu* 38). “Desiring of other’s wife and going to her home in the night is a womaniser and thereby he will meet his death” (*TKM* 19). “The one who aspires other’s wife is a corpse” (*TKL* 143). “Even if a woman desires, it is advisable for men to not desire her” (*CPM* 19). In the sense of adoring the distinctiveness of the family institution, the ethical works insist on the virtue, “One woman for one man”. Also, the act of familial women who love another’s husband is condemned by didactic books. Social etiquette is embedded in the view that there should not be sexual relations outside the familial establishment. Although society has always insisted on decrees and manners for a woman through public conscience and didactic treatises, yet it causes a problem for the ethical scriptures as the familial woman can take arbitrary decisions on her own. When the bygone society was not concerned with the woman having sex with a man of her choice during the Sangam period, the new changes that occurred in the didactic period of the Tamil society is worth studying. When the ethnic tribe’s social lifestyle degenerates and the concept of the nation grows, the compulsion arises for the woman to accept the man coming from outside. It is also shocking to see the self-selection of the women who are influenced by the Jainism, Buddhism and Vedic religions. Like relishing the land in the exterior after conquering it, the image called “familial woman” is projected to enjoy the woman’s body in the “interior”. It is in the notion of restricting sexual desire, the didactic works insist that the other’s wife should not desire the husband of another woman.

A woman who happened to be a wife in the family, how she should be? What she should do? The norms dictated by didactic works on these queries are significant in the feminist reading. “By the dignified women, the respect of familial life will rise” (*NMK* 20). “There is none like her husband to the woman” (*Ibid.*, 57). “Living harmoniously

with the husband is a good deed for the woman” (*Ibid.*, 87). “The woman shall not worship a god other than her husband” (*Ibid.*, 91). “In the absence of a good wife, the domestic life will be ruined” (*Ibid.*, 2). “The home without the wife is a graveyard” (*NAR* 361). “The domestic life will not flourish if the wife loses dignity” (*MMK* 52). “A woman who does not know the nature of her husband cannot be his wife” (*Ibid.*, 51). “The domestic life where the husband and wife live harmoniously is good” (*Iniyavai Nāṛpadu* 2). “The chaste wife is the nectar to her husband” (*CPM* 4). “Living with a chaste woman is the medicine for the good life” (*TKM* 1). Such notions in the case of women, especially with the idea of their chastity, change the women’s exclusive pure body into the sacred one. Thereby they alter the woman’s body as the field of sexual passion for men continuously keeping it in the binary opposition i.e. pure X impure. Imposing the following idea on women in the name of the family that “A good wife worships her husband as God”, is an attempt to constantly suppress women’s bodies and to lose their self-respect. The ethical works very subtly imposed such politics on the Tamil society.

As a wife, the woman became more of an object of sexual pleasure to her husband than being concerned about her sexual enjoyment or sexual passion. Further, the didactic treatises emphasize that the woman shall have a sexual relationship with her husband to bear children for him. Women don’t have the right to decide whether they want to have a child or not. Society does care more about the woman’s womb. The moral scriptures tried to alter bearing the child by a woman as a necessity of society. In the feudalistic social system, children were considered as the societal assets to fight in future battles and to labour in lands. Hence, the ethical books showed much concern on the sexual relationship of husband and wife. Whether it is a man or a woman, sexual intercourse is a natural phenomenon that spontaneously arises in the body and mind, depending on the person’s passion. Especially, the sexual intercourse between husband and wife is purely private. In such a scenario, insisting the sexual intercourse of

the husband and wife as a virtue by the ethical works would facilitate the woman's body to be dominated by men.

"Soon after the menstruation period, the husband ought to have sex with his wife regularly for the next twelve days without leaving her even for a while" (*ĀK* 42). "A husband who does not have sex with his wife is like the person who abandoned his academics" (*TKM* 17). There is no respect for the menses of the woman who does not have the husband" (*Ibid.*, 66). The didactic works have tried to impart the information among the people that there is a possibility for childbirth if there is sexual intercourse after the monthly cycle of menstruation. At the same time, the attitude of neglecting the woman's sexual intercourse, which is the imbued act of mind and body, by fully limiting it to body alone, is a denial of the woman's identity.

The ethical treatises also emphasize how a woman should behave in family life. "The chaste women should take care of hospitality" (*NAR* 382). "If the benign look of the wife grows, the number of relatives will grow" (*NMK* 93). "The women observing the virtuous deeds determinedly never look at the handsome body of other men except that of her husband" (*ĀK* 77). "The distinguishing characteristic of the wife is to have children and hailing the virtue of familial life besides extending hospitality to guests" (*TKM* 64). The ethical texts pronounce the important virtues of the woman as follows: "The woman as a wife should behave obediently and serve her husband. She should bear children, take care of her relatives and extend hospitality." These are the moral preaching in the language of man that is thrown at the woman. We apprehend the virtues that suggest that as a wife, the woman cannot hold any opinions and that she should live merely as an object taking care of the needs of her husband and children, and crushing her self-identity. There are no references about the woman's literacy and taking part in social life. So, there is no possibility for the exclusive face for the woman in the construction of didactic works. Her world contracts within the sphere of the home itself.

Men's relationship with prostitutes is very disgracefully depicted in the ethical texts. There are a lot of virtuous notions which denounce the dealings of prostitutes dictated in the ethical works. There is no proper understanding of the injunctions rendered by the ethical treatises which advise men not to have sex with prostitutes. The ethical texts are concerned with the activity of men, but not with the plight of the prostitutes created by the male-dominated society. The moral precepts that degrade the public woman as if she had come down from an alien world, without censuring the society that created her, is biased, rather one-sided. We notice a trend that is featured in ethical works that instead of taking note of the reasons for which a woman sells her body for material gain, they think of her body as an object meant for sexual pleasure. Be it a family-woman or prostitute, the ethical texts in general intensely played their micropolitics of obliterating the identity of the women's body. So, the sexual passion gets transformed as a technique of the man in the approach where the woman's body is equated to an object meant for the sexual enjoyment of the man. It is this kind of male-dominated viewpoint that becomes the basis for all the violence committed on the woman and all sorts of sexual violations in history.

"The excellence of the woman who lived in accordance with the norms of chastity divulged by the ethical texts will be known after her death" (CPM 96). This verse finds an important place in the feminist reading. In a sense, it is a form of violence when society oppresses a woman on the basis of gender and fails to respect her when she was very much alive but venerates her later as *pattiṇi* (the chaste wife) upon her death. Neither honour nor disgrace would bother a dead woman. It is to be borne in our mind that many women in the Tamil tradition, including Kaṇṇagi, have been transfigured as *pattiṇis* and subsequently worshipped only after their death. This is a trick that the male-dominion has found to oppress the woman. The notion of ethical treatise emphasizing the woman has to forsake everything such as feelings, right, desire, hatred, heart, etc., and she ought to serve

others just for earning the tag “*pattiṇi*” that too after her death, is, indeed an atrocity against her.

In this context, the following definition of the *Cirupaṇcamūlam* (Verse 25) on the exclusive characteristics of an evil woman is to be noted.

*kaḷḷuṇḍal kāṇil kaṇavan pirinduraidal*  
*veḷgila ḷāyppīrar īrcēral uḷḷip*  
*piṛarkarumam āṛāydaḷ tīppen kiḷaimait*  
*tīramadutīp penṇiṇ toḷil*

In the above quoted verse, the virtue is pronounced that “The woman who drinks toddy, who lives away from her husband, who lives shamelessly in other’s home, who studies others’ deeds, and the one who has a friendship with the evil woman are the women doing evil things.”

The woman who drinks toddy belongs to the legacy of poetess Avvaiyār of the Sangam era. Just to oppress the woman religiously, branding the drinking of toddy as a sin is not acceptable. We shall accept a particular point that a woman who has a friendship with an evil woman will have troubles. There lies an atrocity in the assertion of the virtue that a woman should live with her husband without breaking away from him. It is cruel to insist the woman wait all the time for the husband who went away to take part in war or in search of wealth and advise her to tolerate the torture of the brutal husband the way the traditional Tamil women do. Further, it is ridiculous to define the women—living away from their husbands on account of jobs or strained relationships—as evil persons. The implication of the injunction that the woman who lives in someone else’s house is evil, stresses the ruling that the woman should not go anywhere other than her parents’ home or in-laws’ home. It is a narrow-minded expectation that the woman’s world should shrink within the four walls of the home where she has been forced to live in duress, being ignorant of the world’s custom and general knowledge.

The notion that a woman should not observe the actions of others completely negates the woman's knowledge. The moral preaching that the woman should mechanically accept others' utterings, whatever they may be as they were uttered, without any question denies the existence of the woman. The ethical texts made efforts to transmute the woman as a person with no opinions, despite her having thinking abilities at par with men. If we take the stanzas of this verse as a virtue, all the women who're alive today will be regarded as evil. So, these sorts of virtues are not acceptable. When all the characteristics of the woman emphasized by the ethical texts are collectively analysed, we realize that the said texts have tried to construct the fitting image of the woman to the liking of the characteristics and desires of men. The woman's body, moulded for the benefit of men, is a photocopy of slave bodies. The image of a woman found in the didactic works and the models of a woman repeatedly constructed are the manifestations of male-dominated politics. When we read the ethical texts keeping aside the rhetoric that "An ethical text is the compendium of great truths suitable for everyone and every age", the assessments divulged by them can be shocking. While considering the Sangam literature as the identity of Tamils, it is not possible to ignore the Eighteen Tamil didactic works which disgrace the women without even considering them as living beings. Only these didactic works serve as the basic source for the grand discourses which constructed the traditional image of the so-called Tamil woman.

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## Learning and Teaching in Paḷamoli Nāṇūru

The Sangam literary texts composed in the Tamil language have chronicled the life of ancient Tamils. When the ethnic tribal community's life underwent a change because of *vēndaṇ*'s reign, it became strong during the Sangam period wherein the creative works were authored in favour of the property proprietorship society. With the crumbling of *pāṇar marabu* (bards' legacy), the *pulavargaḷ* (poets cum philosophers) came closer to kings. We seemingly understand the influence of the Vedic religion and heterodox religions viz. Buddhism and Jainism in the lives of Sangam Tamils. Following the *aṛam* (virtue), *nerimuraigaḷ* (moral principles) and *vidigaḷ* (rules and regulations), the micropolitics has been embedded in the teachings of "Paḍiṇeḷ Kīlkkāṇakku Nūlgaḷ" ("The Post-Sangam Eighteen Works"). The ethical notions tried to pacify the economically weaker, the caste-oppressed and the sexually repressed people for their indisposition and accept it as fate. The injunctions of ethical works had tried to mould society as a single entity. It is in this backdrop that one has to assess the education system that prevailed during the Sangam period. The assessments about education have been chronicled enormously by versifiers in their didactic texts. *Paḷamoli Nāṇūru* (*PMN*), (Proverbs Four Hundred) by Muṇṇurūrai Araiyaṇār is a compilation of *mudumoli*s (adages) aka proverbs wherein each proverb teaches a moral or a virtue. They have chronicled the then-

existing divergent social customs of the people. Of these, the notions of education that form the first and foremost place in making an individual as a social being are significant. Mun̄ṟurai Araiyaṇār, a Jaina monk, has given the priority to four kinds of *dāṇangaḷ* (gifts in charity) that are emphasized by the Jainism. Those four gifts in charity viz. free offering of food, education, medicine and shelter are the basic even for today's life. The proclamation of Jainism that "One should offer free education to each and everybody irrespective of one's birth and gender difference" was against the Vedic religion. Of the Jaina tenets, Araiyaṇār has given importance only to education.

The notion that the development of knowledge takes place through letters is not acceptable. Without theoretical knowledge, the ancient Tamils had immense expertise in various fields such as construction, medicine, sculpture, astronomy, food, livestock rearing, woodworks, etc. Their hereditary knowledge was passed on to generations orally. But the European education system derides those who do not know how to write and read. But it is a practical lesson that even a person ignorant of letters/scripts can be a rare talent. Such knowledge can be termed as "ungathered knowledge". The knowledge received from the ancestors, glitter as the formal education as well as the skill of execution.

Education always dominates society on two levels. It can be divided into two categories: One, the traditional script learning process. Second, the inheritance of the family occupation through progenitors. The values associated with education in ancient Tamil society were important. The details about learning and teaching found in the *Paḷamoḷi* text were the societal chronicles of the day. The following verse of Araiyaṇār elucidates how one should acquire the knowledge:

*uṇarkīṇiya iṇṇūr piṇḍuḷiil leṇṇum*  
*kiṇarragattut tēraipōl āgār kaṇakkiṇai*  
*muṇṇap pagalum muṇiyā diṇidōdik*  
*karraliṇ kēṭṭalē naṇṇu.*  
*(Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru 5)*

Those men –  
 though they try to learn maths the whole day  
 on their own without frustration but with self-interest,  
 would not be like a frog,  
 thinking there is no sweet potable water  
 than that of the well where it lives.  
 It is always good to listen to the teachings of a teacher.  
 (Tr.: Author)

Araiyaṇār's opinion that "It is always better to listen to the teachings from a competent teacher than learning the same whole day by oneself" is worth analysing. There is very little chance for a person to have a clear understanding when he/she studies a new text by himself/herself. When he/she learns a text by listening to the teachings of a competent teacher, there is every possibility for him/her to get the doubts clarified immediately. The versifier uses an analogy where he compares a person studying a text by himself/herself to the frog living in well waters which is oblivious of any sweet water existing outside the well. From this verse, we understand the philosophy of education that divulges into the merits of listening to the teachings. The aforesaid illustration of the author essayed in the text is important. And when a teacher deftly describes the place and merit of the text in the given society, the learning skill of the student will automatically improve. The view of Araiyaṇār on education perfectly suits modern science education as well.

A verse in the *Paḷamoḷi Nānūru*, while illustrating a point mentions, "The learned person will get honour automatically wherever he/she goes". This candidly refers to the benefits of education.

*ārravum karrār arivuḍaiyār aḥḍuḍaiyār*  
*nārricaiyum cellāda nāḍillai annāḍu*  
*vērrunā ḍāgā damavēyām āyiṇāl*  
*ārrunā vēṇḍuva dil*  
 (Paḷamoḷi Nānūru 4)

Learned men are those who studied  
 and learnt texts worth learning.

Those learned men's fame  
 spread in all four directions.  
 No country remains oblivious to them.  
 These countries no longer remain alien,  
 but become their own.  
 Hence, there is no need for such men  
 to carry food packed on their way!  
 (Tr.: Author)

“The men of knowledge are the ones who learnt only those worthy books which were supposed to be learnt”. The stanza expressing the above-said notion ostensibly denotes the relationship between education and knowledge. There is no country where the fame of such learned people does not spread in all its four directions. Those countries are not alien to them. All countries then would become their own countries. The learned do not have to carry any food packet when they go out of their village/town. One's ideology is shaped by studying texts which make them learned. By the virtue of proficiency of knowledge, there arises a change of situation wherein the learned becomes an asset to the world by retreating from a smaller circle. “Everyone will respect and adulate the learned”. The quoted statement of Araiyaṇār reveals the profound understanding of the learning. How society could encounter certain changes that take place in an individual self by his/her learning or education, is very much relevant even to the present day.

Understanding of the unlettered men, who do not concern regarding education but remain idle, is also in a sense relevant to learning or education.

*kallāda variḍaik kaṭṭuraiyiṇ mikkadōr*  
*pollāda dillai oruvaṟku nallāy*  
*iḷukkattiṇ mikka iḷivillai illai*  
*oḷukkattiṇ mikka uyarvu*  
 (Paḷamoli Nāṇūru 15)

For a person,  
 nothing else is more evil

than saying a good thing to an illiterate.  
 For a virtuous man,  
 nothing else is more disreputable  
 than his own acts of blemish;  
 there is no honour greater  
 than his own virtuous act.  
 (Tr.: Author)

“There is nothing more evil than revealing something thoughtful to the illiterates. There is nothing more disgraceful to a good man than to be discredited by his/her immoral conduct. There is no honour greater than the tribute coming out of being righteousness”, thus states the versifier. However, he implicitly connotes, “Even talking to an unlearned will lead a person to the wicked”. “There is no greater evil than going to unlettered man and talking about the affirmation of life with him”. This notion has apparently drawn the difference that exists between the *karravar* (learned men) and the *kallāḍavar* (illiterates). The men labelled here as *kallāḍavar* are the people who do not care about societal development but live waywardly. The reference of Araiyaṇār over the illiterates that “*kallāḍavar* are the people who commit immoral deeds and live against the society”, reveals the prevailing close relationship between education and virtue.

If any task is handed over to a learned/skilled man, the outcome will surely be encouraging. The said opinion fairly illustrates the merit of the education/learning in the verse given below:

*urrāṇ urāaṇ enalvēṇḍā oṇporuḷaik*  
*karrāṇai nōkkiyē kaiviḍuga karrāṇ*  
*kiḷavaṇ uraikēḷkum kēḷāṇ eṇiṇum*  
*iḷavanru eruḍuṇḍa uppu*  
 (Paḷamoḷi Nānūru 172)

Without thinking of someone whether a relative or not,  
 good work should be handed over to a learned person.  
 The learned man may not listen to his master at times,  
 but he will not bring loss to him.  
 His disobedience is similar to the salt eaten by a bull.  
 (Tr.: Author)

When selecting someone to carry out a job, one should not think about whether the person is a close relative or non-relative. Only after a thorough hunt, the job should be handed over to a learned/skilled person. Such a learned person can listen to the master's words. Even if the learned does not listen to the master's words, it will be as good as the salt eaten by a bull, but will not be a loss. Araiyaṇār thus clearly denotes the change that takes place in one's characteristics due to learning in a stanza of the above-said verse. Through the analogy, it is pointed out in the verse that the learned man, though not listening to the words of the master, will serve the latter just like a bull, despite eating more salt, would always work more energetically for its owner and produce excessive fertility, as it has become stronger.

“To whom to teach? Will everyone excel at learning?” Araiyaṇār, who contemplated thus, defines the aspects of education as follows:

*naṟkaṟivu illārai nāṭṭavum māṭṭādē  
coṟkuṟi koṇḍu tuḍipaṇ uṟuttuvapōl  
veṟpaṟaimēl tāḷum ilangaruvi naṇṇāḍa  
kaṟṟaṟivu pōgā kaḍai  
(Paḷamoli Nāṇūru 28)*

Oh lord of the mountain country  
of a stream falling from the top of the hill!  
It is not possible to mould men as learned  
only by imparting education to those  
who are not naturally virtuous.  
Like incompatible music of *tuḍi*,  
played without the correct knowledge of rhyme,  
educational knowledge alone does not make sense.  
(Tr.: Author)

“By imparting education alone one cannot be made those men who do not have a sense of good knowledge in their nature as wise men”. This notion tries to approach learning/education in the psychological framework. No matter how great the teaching is, if the person who is acquiring the education is not interested or is not practising the

learning in life, then the learning/education does not give many benefits. The knowledge acquired by learning good books alone does not become meritorious in practical life. When a person acquires the knowledge of a new thing every day through learning alone, his knowledge will progress.

Educational learning is an endless process. Remaining without haughtiness is essential for everyone when the person is said to have been learning something continually from birth to death.

*corr<sub>or</sub>um cōrvu paḍudalāl cōrvinrik*  
*kar<sub>or</sub>um kallādēṇ enru valiyirangi*  
*urroṇru cindittu uḷanroṇru ariyumēl*  
*kar<sub>or</sub>untāṇ kallāda vāru*  
 (Paḷamoḷi Nānūru 2)

Uttering something serious in front of a learned  
 can cause weariness at times.  
 But one should not lose heart.  
 “I am not adequately educated”,  
 one should not have such an inferiority complex.  
 It is necessary to find out a way to overcome it.  
 While doing so,  
 every new thing may seem weird in the beginning.  
 (Tr.: Author)

When a person speaks in front of the learned, his/her words may appear unnerved or slackened. So, one should not get nervous. When learning something new, without having an inferiority complex and thinking of himself/herself as unlettered, one should think about the learning process and learn that subject with full involvement enthusiastically, and energetically accomplish any task. While learning something new, it will seem difficult and thereby the tendency of estrangement will appear. “What one learnt is limited to a fistful of the earth; the learning has the nature of expanding boundlessly”. The quoted thought of Araiyaṇār regarding learning/education has farsightedness.



Even though one naturally has the edifying knowledge, but is not literate, his/her knowledge does not become outstanding.

*kallādāṇ kaṇḍa kaḷinuṭṭam kaṛṛārmuṇ*  
*colluṇkāl cōrvu paḍutalāl nallāy*  
*viṇāmun durāda uraiyillai illai*  
*kaṇāmun durāda viṇai*  
*(Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru 12)*

Oh a good man!  
 When an illiterate utters some finest details  
 in front of learned men,  
 he may feel weariness!  
 If there is no question first, then no answer would follow.  
 There is no action before the dream.  
 (Tr.: Author)

“If a question does not arise at all, then no answer arises. If at all, a dream does not occur first, then no action will take place. When explaining something in a packed hall of the learned men, one’s natural knowledge will not be respected as his/her words would have become slackened.” It is illustrated in this verse that learning is essential for the brilliance of natural knowledge. The verse beginning with “*kulaviccaī kallāmal bhāgam paḍum*” (PMN 6) mentions that “A person’s knowledge automatically will enrich based on his birth”. Based on the Vedic religion, this poem emphasizes the process of justifying one’s presence in society.

The versifier Araiyaṇār emphasizes the necessity of having a relationship with learned men.

*kalviyāṇ āya kaḷinuṭṭam kallārmuṇ*  
*colliya nallavum tiyavām ellām*  
*ivarvarai nāḍa tamaraiyil lārkkku*  
*nagaramum kāḍupōṇ rāngu*  
*(Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru 14)*

Oh lord of the mountain desired by every being!  
 The way even the town looks like a forest

for those who have no relatives,  
 even the good things  
 out of the finest things  
 that are earned by learning the texts  
 said to the unlearned men,  
 can become meaningless and depraved  
 (Tr.: Author)

No matter how appealingly one told the grand nuances acquired out of the educational knowledge, but they will be considered wrong. So, it will be an enthusiastic moment always for a wise person if he/she accompanies a learned person.

In the absence of one acquiring the knowledge by self-learning or ability to know the truth through the learned, the person will not know the truth accurately.

The following verse, which describes the modesty of the learned person, seems relevant even to the present-day situation:

*kaṛṛarindār kaṇḍa aḍakkam aṛiyādār*  
*poccāndu tammaip pugaḷnduraippār terrā*  
*aṛaikāl aruvi aṇimalai nāḍa*  
*nīraikuḍam nīrtaḷumbal il*  
 (Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru 9)

Oh lord of the mountain country,  
 holding a crystal-clear water stream  
 falling on huge rocks!  
 Learned men always conduct with humility.  
 Unlearned men praise themselves and blabber.  
 The water in the wholly filled pots  
 never brims out the vessel!  
 (Tr.: Author)

The real modesty is the humbleness of those men who have studied the worthy books and had a clear understanding out of that exercise. Out of ignorance, the illiterates will have the nature of forgetting their actual position but boosting themselves in vain. It is a very appropriate

simile that “The learned men simply do not boost themselves, as water in the wholly filled pot does not brim out of the vessel”. “The bad deeds done by the learned men will automatically bring shame to them” (*PMN* 10). It is embedded in the public conscience of Tamils that “The brilliant learned men will not deviate from the virtues”.

The proverbs that have been placed at the last line of each verse in the *Paḷamoḷi Nāṇūru* text have compiled the ideas that already exist in the public consciousness in shorter form. The gathering of proverbs by Araiyaṇār and his illustrated opinions on learning/education are worthy of deep analysis, especially in the milieu of Tamil Nadu, where positive assessments on education are prevailing. They continue to exist as an idea of education of the bygone era.

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## Characterization of Mādhavi in Cilappatikāram

There existed an asymmetrical society during the Sangam era in the historical milieu, where *kurunila maṇṇar* (kings of small regions) and *vēndar* (kings/emperors), who had had certain vestiges of an ethnic tribal community and consolidated their reigning authority. *Cilappatikāram* (CPK), (pronounced *Cilappadigāram*), “The Story of Anklet”, supposed to have been composed in the fag end of the Sangam period i.e. 200 CE chronicled the moments of Tamil’s life of the past. We notice the political life of the Sangam era Tamils’ was much more changed as depicted in the Tamil epics period. In the epic *Cilappatikāram*, it is illustrated that the Cēra, Cōḷa, Pāṇḍiya kings ruled the territory of Tamil Nadu. It needs to be mentioned here that in CPK, there is no reference to the *kurunila maṇṇar* of the Sangam epoch. We need to think over the political necessity of putting forth the discourse on *mūvēndar* (Three emperors) in the epic. One can see the deep pervasion of Vedic religion and heterodox faiths such as Jainism and Buddhism in people’s lives depicted in the CPK. As the society of wealth proprietorship grew stronger, the decrees justifying inequalities became influential. The woman character portrayed by the Sangam literature remained distinctive as the vestiges of matrilineal society. Besides suppressing the existence of women based on sex/gender, the narration of the CPK’s story has been continued via Tamil didactic

works that drew new rules about womanhood. Although there were references about *parattai* (concubine) in Sangam literature, there was no mention of a woman selling her body for money in the classical works. The reference about the emergence of woman's category called *kaṇigaiyar kulam* (courtesan community) and their indulgence in sex work denotes the changes that took place in the social assessment of the woman. Iṅgō Aḍigal, the author of the epic, very finely portrays Mādhavi, a girl born in such a *kaṇigaiyar kulam* in his magnum opus viz. *Cilappatikāram*.

The epic is written based on the then available folk stories of Kaṇṇagi-Kōvalaṇ, which was prevalent among the public domain for ages. Though the story of epic magnifies by focussing on Kōvalaṇ, the male protagonist, as its central character, the rise of Kaṇṇagi, his wife to the goddess position, paves way for a new discourse on the woman. Kaṇṇagi, who belonged to a merchant community, becomes the cause of king Pāṇḍiya's death, one of the mighty three kings of Tamil Nadu.

With the narration of Kaṇṇagi's story, the ruling authority of the kingdom becomes a subject of questions in the socio-religious milieu when the Vedic religion and Jainism dominated the people. It is obligatory to identify the necessity of the emergence of *pattiṇik kaḍavuḷ* (Goddess of Chastity) anew in the context of worshipping of various deities that prevailed at that time. Mādhavi, another female character of the epic, plays a significant role in the epic's course of the narrative. In the transformed male-dominated society, where relishing the land seized by battles/wars in the "exterior realm" and enjoying a woman's body in the "interior sphere" became the norm, the character Mādhavi has been portrayed as the antagonist to elevate Kaṇṇagi to the position of a goddess. As illustrated in a supernatural episode of the epic, it is required to know, "What achievement of hers made the celestials take her with her human body to their abode". She awaits her husband who departed from her after a few years of happy married life. She accompanies him to Madurai city when the latter decides to leave his hometown (immediately after he returned home)

to earn wealth. When he was mistakenly killed by the Pāṇḍiya king, she instantly becomes furious and seeks justice from the king; she burns Madurai city with fire. As she walked to the mountain region with grief, she became a goddess. It is important that Kaṇṇagi, the woman who was being docile in her domestic life, raises her voice in the royal court for the rights of her deceased husband. In the social milieu, where the unlimitable authority of the king prevailed, the will of people questioning against it was fulfilled through Kaṇṇagi. Mādhavi, a gifted danseuse, comes in handy to make the Kaṇṇagi a goddess, the woman whose tender tread is unknown even to the Earth-woman. As the bedrock to describe the tragic future of Kaṇṇagi, who had a happy married life with Kōvalaṇ, the episode making him leave his wife for Mādhavi, has become a tragic event in the epic. The author of the epic, who wanted to set the stage for Kōvalaṇ's departure from Kaṇṇagi, portrays Mādhavi, the damsel of danseuse as a queen of art.

The character Mādhavi has greatly helped to take the story forward in *CPK*. Kōvalaṇ, one of the young men of the Pūmpuhār city, who used to wander around the bazaar street, came from a wealthy background. Mādhavi, born in the courtesan community, accomplishes in the fine arts of dance and music in consonance with the custom of her community's heritage. Mādhavi's maiden dance performance is staged in the Cōḷa King's royal court. The details of music, musical instruments, songs and dance performances that prevailed during that period, construct Mādhavi's aptitudes. It is quite natural that poetic embellishments and supernatural events find a place in the epic tradition. It would be disgraceful to the characterisation of Kōvalaṇ, to present him as the man who got allured to the beauty of an average courtesan the Mādhavi. It may be a fact that Kōvalaṇ is a kind of man who desires to have sexual relations with every woman he likes, as Iḷaṅgō Aḍigaḷ wanted to portray Mādhavi as the opposite character to the beauty of Kaṇṇagi, the descriptions of the former's artistic aptitudes have found a place in the epic. As the author aims to portray

Kaṇṇagi as the symbol of chastity of women and wants to construct a penetrating image of the conflicting character Mādhavi, he comprised the “Arangērruk Kādai” (“Episode of the Debut”) in the epic.

Mādhavi is twelve years old when she makes her debut in “Arangērruk Kādai” of *CPK*. Iṅgō Aḍigaḷ mentions that she has mesmerising chubby physical features. She has lustrous little fingers ornamented with ruby rings manipulating the different strings that resembled a hive of humming-bees, huge flower-like wide eyes, reddish eyes, and the waist holding up of loins. The debut dance performance of Mādhavi, who has successful training for seven years in dance, song and in the grace of form, is staged in the royal court of Cōḷa king.

*poṇṇiyal pūṇkoḍi purinduḍaṇ vagutteṇa*  
*nāṭṭiya naṇṇūḷ nangu kaḍaippiḍittuk*  
*kāṭṭiṇaḷ* .....  
 (“Arangērruk Kādai”, Lines 157-59)

In her quick movement, she looked like a golden creeper animated with life. Because her dance was perfect and scientifically correct.

(Tr.: V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar 1939: 104)

Appearing on the stage, Mādhavi very exquisitely danced to the referent of *Nāṭya Śāstra* like a golden creeper animated with life. Seeing her proficiency in dance, the king, in due recognition, presents her with a green-leaves garland and also confers her title of *Talaikkōl* as she danced impeccably without any incongruity of dance formula. As per the custom of the day, the king presents her One Thousand and Eight coins of gold. Mādhavi, presumed to have been born in the courtesan clan—a descendant of the celestial Ūrvasi lineage—is auctioned as a sales item, as per her community’s custom. A hunch-backed woman is handed over a garland and asked to stand out in the street where the rich citizens of the city pass through as if Mādhavi is offered for sale, and to announce that “This garland is worth of a sum of 1008 *kaḷaṇcus* (ancient coins of Tamil Nadu) of very excellent gold.

He who buys this garland becomes the husband of our creeper-like lady". Naturally, the question arises here whether Mādhavi's debut is for her dance art or her body projected through the art. The debut, in a sense, seems to be the commencement of introducing Mādhavi, the small girl of the courtesan community, in sex work. We notice a stark contrast in the *CPK* deviating from the Sangam heritage, which gives importance to *aṇbiṇ aintiṇai* (Five-fold interior landscapes) and licences to a woman to choose a man of her liking and to live with him. It is belittling for a woman that anyone wandering in the street with money in his hand can buy the garland and thereby have sexual intercourse with Mādhavi. Obviously, the body and mind of the twelve-year-old Mādhavi then might not have matured enough. As such, the social system of the day which pushes her into sexual relationships has transformed the woman as an item of possession or material of property. As 1008 *poṇ kaḷaṇcus* is determined to be the price for Mādhavi's body, her mind is completely ignored. The society, which does not care about Mādhavi's mind, does not understand the mind of Kaṇṇagi as well. In the males' society, there exist the bodies of two different women only, on one side Mādhavi, and on the other side, Kaṇṇagi.

The epic projects the following acts of Kaṇṇagi as the dexterities of a chaste woman—waiting for him, accompanying him to Madurai on his perusal, setting Madurai on fire seeking justice from the Pāṇḍiya king for the unjust killing of her husband, etc., even though Kōvalaṇ happens to be the wicked husband. It is considered as the custom of chaste women like Kaṇṇagi to ignore Kōvalaṇ's womanising act, although the latter has sexual intercourse with Mādhavi, Vasantamālai and others. On the other side, the assessment of society which degrades the act of Mādhavi, who is in a grave situation to sell her body just for living, remains a question. To highlight the image of Kaṇṇagi, the image of Mādhavi is fashioned as a character of homogeneity in *CPK*. Though Kōvalaṇ's sexual acts have been critiqued, his societal rank has not been dishonoured. As soon as he



lands at his wife Kaṇṇagi's place after breaking away from Mādhavi, his guilt instantly disappears when he regrets his shameful sexual act. Referring to the girl Maṇimēkalai (pronounced Maṇimēgalai), born to the relationship of Kōvalaṇ and Mādhavi, as the daughter of Kaṇṇagi by Mādhavi herself is the reflection of realizing her position in the society. Realizing that it is impossible to get away from the decree of Vedic religion that differentiates human beings based on birth, Mādhavi tries to do away with the ignominy of Maṇimēkalai that was caused by her birth. That is why she refers to her own daughter Maṇimēkalai as the daughter of Kaṇṇagi.

The views of T.P. Meenakshisundaram and others on the “Kāṇalvari Kādai” (“Seashore Songs Episode”), considered as the turning point of the story of *CPK*, are worth examining. If we read the *CPK* very carefully, we can understand the characteristics of Kōvalaṇ. He lives like a playboy by spending the wealth that he inherited from his parents. He does not take up seriously his hereditary family business. He spends generously during the birthday celebration of Maṇimēkalai, born to him and Mādhavi. Kōvalaṇ reaches the point of penury where he loses the colossal wealth by spending it without any other source of income. He has sexual relations not only with Mādhavi but also with her friend Vasantamālai. Mādhavi's relationship might have become monotonous to Kōvalaṇ, who is all the time suffering from sexual passion. The state of bankruptcy might have also bewildered him. The dance performance of Mādhavi for twenty-eight days in the Indra Carnival frustrates him for some reason. It is in this state of affairs, the mind of Kōvalaṇ, who has left for seashore along with Mādhavi, is in a tumult. The *kāṇalvari* (Seashore Songs) sung by them become the cause of accelerating confrontation within him. Developing hatred over Mādhavi because of her *kāṇalvari* songs by Kōvalaṇ has become handy for Iḷaṅgō Aḍigaḷ to take the story of the epic to the next level. The *kāṇalvari* songs, structured on the line of Sangam *Akattiṇai* (Interior Landscape) convention, very finely chronicle the man-woman relationship. Mādhavi and Kōvalaṇ were

sitting in the lovely tent on the beach of Pūmpuhār where the river Cauvery (Kāviri) joins the sea. Kōvalaṇ began to sing and play the *yāl* (a stringed musical instrument/a lute) that he took from Mādhavi.

*tingaḷ mālai veṇkuḍaiyāṇ  
ceṇṇi ceṇkōl adu ōcci  
gangai taṇṇaiṇ puṇarndālum  
pulavāy vāḷi kāvēri  
gangai taṇṇaiṇ puṇarndālum  
pulavādolīdal kayar kaṇṇāy  
mangai mādar peruṇ karpeṇru  
arindēṇ vāḷi kāvēri.  
("Kāṇal Vari", Song 2)*

Hail to thee, Kāvēri! Even if our Cola King, whose garlanded parasol is as white as the moon, extends his righteous sceptre far and weds the Ganges, thou wilt not sulk. I have learnt, O fish-eyed one, that not sulking, even though he weds the Ganges is the supreme virtue of chaste ladies. Hail to thee, Kaveri!

(Tr.: V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar 1939: 132)

One can have an overt meaning to these stanzas sung by Kōvalaṇ that as (the region) Kāvēri does not sulk with the Cōḷa king though he conquers the (region) Ganges, the chaste woman also does not sulk with her husband even if he is in an extramarital relationship. In another sense, one can also construe the song to be directed at Mādhavi. There should have been other reasons for Kōvalaṇ singing in such a manner, that too at the beginning itself, that it will be the hallmark of chastity to Mādhavi if she digests his adultery, regardless of his relationship with multiple women. While hailing the typical characteristic of his ladylove in songs, Kōvalaṇ, at the same time, blames Mādhavi. Sensing his intention, big beautiful-eyed Mādhavi, who listened to the sea-song (of Kōvalaṇ) hoping a change in his attitude, took the *yāl* from him and pretended to have been pleased, while (actually) sulking. Then she began to play, purposefully, an ode to the sea so fine that the goddess Earth got amused with her

talent; and everyone was in ecstasy when they heard her sweet voice appropriately accompanying the notes of the *yāl*.

*marungu vaṇḍu ciraṇḍārppa*  
*maṇippū āḍaiyadu pōrttuk*  
*karuṅka yaṛkaṇ viḷittolgi*  
*naḍandāy vāḷi kāvēri*  
*karuṅka yaṛkaṇ viḷittolgi*  
*naḍanda ellām niṇ kaṇavaṇ*  
*tirundu ceṇkōl vaḷaiyāmai*  
*aṛindēṇ vāḷi kāvēri.*  
 (“Kāṇalvari”, Song 25)

“Hail to thee, Kaveri! clothing thyself in a garb of fair flowers where bees cluster murmuring their songs, thou walkedst along with swaying steps, with carp-like dark eyes. All this walk of thine, with thy carp-like dark eyes, is, I know, due to thy husband’s righteous sceptre which does not deviate from the right path. Hail to thee, Kaveri!”  
 (Tr.: V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar 1939: 137)

By referring to Cōḷa king as the husband and the Kāvēri as his wife, Mādhavi seeks to establish herself as wife and Kōvalaṇ as her husband. Mādhavi’s ability to sing with musical skill has been finely expressed in the “Kāṇalvari” episode. By playing the *yāl*, Mādhavi continues to sing traditional songs which are composed in the line of the *akattiṇai* convention. Subsequently, they sulked because of the implied connotations of the songs. Kōvalaṇ became angry due to the exclusive nature of Mādhavi. Hearing her alluring songs, Kōvalaṇ thought the following to himself and got up and went away from there:

*kāṇalvari tāṇpāḍa tāṇonriṇmēl maṇamvaittu*  
*māyappoy palakūṭṭum māyattāl pāḍiṇāḷeṇa*  
 (“Kāṇalvari”, Song 52)

“I sang the *kāṇalvari*, but she, the cunning one combining several deceitful lies, sang with her mind upon someone else”  
 (Tr.: V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar 1939: 143)

But Mādhavi is still alone there on the seashore. A man's typical attitude of not being able to tolerate a woman's individuality, resonates with Kōvalaṇ too, as he is unable to bear Mādhavi's intellectual prowess. In the resilient milieu where women were considered as objects of possession, it is the suspicion developed by Kōvalaṇ over Mādhavi's unilateral attitude that becomes the primary cause for his separation from her.

As such, there is no evidence from the epic of Mādhavi having a sexual relationship other than Kōvalaṇ, though she is born in the courtesan community. Also, there is no evidence that after leaving Kaṇṇagi, Kōvalaṇ constantly lived in the house of Mādhavi, the woman who entertained him sexually and sulking all together to him. He might have often gone to the house where Kaṇṇagi lived. So, Mādhavi hopes that he will come back soon though he left her sulking. The letter given to Vasantamālai by Mādhavi to quell Kōvalaṇ's anger is the indicator of her emotion.

*orutaṇic ceṅkōl orumagaṇ āṇaiyiṇ  
 orumugam aṇṇi ulagu toḷudu iraiṇcum  
 tirumugam pōkkum cevviya lāgi  
 alattagak koḷuṇcēru alaṇi ayaladu  
 pittigaik koḷumugai āṇi kaikkoṇḍu  
 maṇṇuyir ellām magiḷtuṇai puṇarkkum  
 iṇṇiḷa vēṇiḷ ilavara sālaṇ  
 andip pōdagattu arumpiḍart tōṇṇiya  
 tingaḷ celvaṇum cevviyaṇ allaṇ  
 puṇarnda mākkaḷ poḷudu iḍappaḍuppiṇum  
 taṇanda mākkaḷ taṇtuṇai maṇṇappiṇum  
 naṇrupū vāḷiyiṇ nalluyir kōḍal  
 irumpūdu aṇṇu ahdarindu īminēṇa  
 ("Vēṇiṇ Kāḍai", Lines 51-63)*

Under the influence of Cupid who, single-handed exercises his righteous sceptre over the vast world with his flower-arrows, and who is worshipped by the whole earth unexpected, taking in her hand the long stalk of a flower and dipping it in the paste made of red lac and *agar*.

He who has come to rule the world is the youthful prince, ‘Spring’, who brings together the lovers and chosen ones. The moon, who has risen with the love-anguish that shows itself in the evening, also is not faultless. Therefore whether they be lovers who had union and departed and were delayed in coming back, or whether they be lovers who had deserted and forgotten their mates, that this moon should kill the lonely poor ones with his sharp darts of fragrant flowers should be no cause for surprise. Please understand this.

(Tr.: V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar 1939: 147)

Thus, Mādhavi wrote a letter expressing her sexual passion for the petals of the red lily intertwined with the white bent flowers of the ripe screw pine. She is very hopeful that Kōvalaṇ, after reading the letter, would come soon and take away her sorrows. If one delves into the composition of the letter very carefully, it appears that there was already such sulking between them. But Kōvalaṇ, who is now financially impoverished, besides denouncing Mādhavi as a clever *āḍal magaḷ* (dancing-girl), who can act skilfully according to the demand of situations, refuses to accept the letter. His reference to Mādhavi as the daughter of *āḍal magaḷ* is an indicator of his corrupt mind. Iḷaṅgō Aḍigaḷ very finely describes the condition of Mādhavi who came to know of such unfortunate words of Kōvalaṇ through her friend Vasantamālai.

*mālai vārār āyiṇum māṇilai*  
*kālai kāṅguvameṇak kaiyaṛu neṇcamoḍu*  
*pūmalar amaḷimicaip porundādu vadindaṇaḷ*  
*māmalar neḍuṅkaṇ mādhavi tāṇeṇ*  
 (“Vēṇiṛ Kāḍai”, Lines 115-118)

Fairlady, Mādhavi of the long flower-like eyes, said in reply:

“If he does not come this night, we will see him at least tomorrow morning” and (she) sat down with a heavy heart on the couch spread with flowers, sleepless.

(Tr.: V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar 1939: 149)

She consoles herself and says, “We will see him tomorrow morning, even if he does not come this evening”. But her hopes are shattered. Mādhavi sincerely regrets when she learns that Kōvalaṇ has left the town with his wife Kaṇṇagi in a matter of a few days. She gives a letter to Kōsigamāmaṇi (Kausikamāmaṇi), a Brahmin who was on the way to Madurai, to hand it over to Kōvalaṇ. This letter shows the condition of the Mādhavi’s matured mind.

*aḍigaḷ munṇar yāṇaḍi vīṇdēṇ*  
*vaḍiyāk kiḷavi maṇakkolaḷ vēṇḍum*  
*kuravarpaṇi aṇṇiyum kulappirap pāṭṭiyōḍu*  
*iraviḍaik kaḷidarkeṇ pīlaippu aṇṇiyādu*  
*kaiyaṇu neṇcam kaḍidal vēṇḍum*  
*poytīr kātciṇ puraiyōy pōṛri*  
 (“Puraṇcēri Irutta Kādaī”, Lines 87-92)

“My Lord, I fall prostrate before your feet. Kindly forgive my indiscreet words. What is my mistake which made you leave (our city) during the night with your wife of noble birth, even without the knowledge of your parents?

My mind suffers in ignorance. Please relieve me.

O great and true one of exquisite wisdom, may you bless me!”

(Tr.: V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar 1939: 194)

“O Lord, I adore you. Please listen to my words. What went wrong that you left your parents in the middle of the night and went away from our city with your wife Kaṇṇagi of high birth? If it is my fault, please ignore my words by considering them as faultless”. The second letter of Mādhavi shows her mental clarity. “What was the cause for Kōvalaṇ leaving the city along with his wife?” She explains her position that her words stated previously were faultless. When Kōvalaṇ has read these words he felt, “She is not in the wrong; I alone am to blame”. So, he gives the letter back to Kōsigamāmaṇi as if to explain his departure, saying, “The contents of this sealed letter are quite fit to be seen by my faultless parents”. From the said utterance of Kōvalaṇ, we understand his change of heart. The man, who earlier blamed Mādhavi as a false

woman making every false thing appear like truth, changes his opinion about her in due course of time after realising his fault. The course of the narrative of the *CPK* lies in the lack of understanding that if Mādhavi's sexual act is adultery, then that of the Kōvalaṇ should also be adultery.

Following the incident of the singing session at the seashore, the sexual enjoyment of Kōvalaṇ and Mādhavi gets abruptly interrupted. Also, the narrative course of the epic revolving around Kaṇṇagi raises her to attain the status of deification. Mādhavi handovers her daughter, Maṇimēkalai, to her mother Cittirāpati to bring up against the custom of the courtesan community from which she hailed. Following the death of Kōvalaṇ, the decision taken by Mādhavi, who was born in the courtesan community, is audacious. Her age is then probably 29 years as per the assumption of a researcher, A. Palani. Perhaps, her psychological stress must have caused Mādhavi to choose the ascetic life at a young age.

The understanding of Kōvalaṇ constructed by male-mentality about the woman is that she is incapable of functioning independently. He thinks women's physical bodies are the centre of gratifying one's sexual passions. Kaṇṇagi and Mādhavi have been portrayed in the *Cilappatikāram* as the characters that function depending on males. Mādhavi still waits for Kōvalaṇ even after he unilaterally took the wrong decision to part away from her. Deciding on becoming a monk upon hearing the news of Kōvalaṇ's murder is in stark contrast to the Sangam era Tamil custom. Iṇṅō Aḍigaḷ, who wanted to introduce the tenets of Buddhism, employed Mādhavi's character for the said purpose. There is a logical irony that Buddhism, which never had a place in the life of Mādhavi, who excelled in the arts of dance and music, and whose life was full of entertainment and merrymaking events, strangely finding a place in her personal life and making her a Buddhist monk. Portraying the mind of Mādhavi, who hailed from the background that does not fall within the family system alone, but loved only Kōvalaṇ, is a critique over the social milieu of the day put forth by Iṇṅō Aḍigaḷ. It is the Vedic religion that strengthened

the notion that the female body of Mādhavi was not suitable for the institution called “family” while the society allows her, a courtesan by birth, to lead a life with the man she liked. Thus, *Cilappatikāram* has very finely chronicled how religions decided the social existence of the female body *alias* Mādhavi in the bygone days.

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## Re-Reading of Maṇimēkalai

*Maṇimēkalai* (*MM*), (pronounced *Maṇimēgalai*), one of the five epics, is considered as a representation of the Tamil renaissance. The central theme of the epic is the problems faced by a young woman named Maṇimēkalai, born in *kaṇigaiyar* (courtesan) community, her recovery from those problems and becoming a Buddhist monk. Re-reading of the *Maṇimēkalai* should begin with the discourses that have been led on its text for ages. Contemporary assessments of the age-old *MM* have to be seen in defiance of Cāttaṇār's creative purpose. Only then can one represent its course of compatibility with contemporary time.

During the later part of the Sangam era, there emerged a situation of resilience, in which the establishment of big kingdoms and the crumbling of distinctive identities of ethnic tribes took place simultaneously. Relishing the land in the "exterior domain" and enjoying a woman's body in the "interior sphere" have become norms of the day-to-day life of man. *Pāṇargaḷ* (bards), *viṛaliyargaḷ* (songstresses) and *pulavargaḷ* (poets cum philosophers) tried hard to accelerate the expansion of the territory with the identity of Tamil. The notion of *mūvēndar* (Three emperors) rule spread widely with the formation of the kingdom in the Sangam tradition in which *kuḍipperumai* (pride of family/clan) is projected. The then existing primitive religious practices were already widespread in Tamil Nadu.

*Apuṛam* poem (187) of Avvaiyār beginning with the stanza, “*Nāḍāgu onrō avalāgu onrō*” (“Whether you are cleared land or forests”) is the adaptation of morality found in the Buddha’s *Dhammapada*. Jaina and Buddhist monks who came to Tamil Nadu from the North prioritised Tamil. There was a great deal of translation of epics written in Pali, Prakrit and Sanskrit languages. All ancient Tamil epics, except *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, were only adaptations. When one studies the narrative course of the epic, excluding the characters Maṇimēkalai, Cittirāpati and Mādhavi, the exclusiveness of the epic then becomes questionable.

The chronicles about the society of the Sangam era under the ruling of various *kuṛunila maṇṇargaḷ* (kings of small regions) are not found in the epics. Silence prevails about the *kuṛunila maṇṇargaḷ* in the *CPK* and *MM*. There emerges a question about the political necessity of projecting the *mūvēndargaḷ* in epics. A big kingdom is required for the monks who came from outside and entered Tamil Nadu for propagating their religions. It is possible that *kuṛunila maṇṇargaḷ*, who adore their *kuḍipperumai* (honour of family/clan) and custom, would pose a possible obstacle for them. The life of the Sangam Tamils was in harmony with nature as it was dependent on the landscapes. Love and war, in a sense, are celebrations. Drinking toddy, consuming meat and *parattamai* (extramarital relationship) then considered normal. Toddy was offered to the guests who came home. Women also drank toddy and their eyes were reddened. Discourses highlighted the pleasure of bodily excitement between young men and young women (before marriage), who have the same thinking and desire, which later emerged as the literature of “Interior landscape”. There is politics in eulogising conflicts between the ethnic tribes as *vīram* (valour/heroism). The contradictory position to these propensities can be seen in the literature of the epics’ period where the *Maṇimēkalai* belongs.

There have been major changes in every day’s life. The position of total disregard to life in the Sangam era, enthusiastically projecting

human bodies, is a very significant change that took place during the epic period. In this epoch, drinking toddy and eating meat were considered acts of disgrace. There is no discourse about sexual pleasure enjoyed by human's bodies. The attempt of religions trying to suppress the physical enjoyments of human bodies by any means is displayed in the *MM* epic. There lies religious intent in the numerous supernatural events and parables of undue super miracles featured in the epic *MM*, considered to be the continuity of *CPK*. The insistence of a precept throughout the epic that all occurrences in everyday life of human beings have a connection with previous births is nothing but religious propaganda. Emphasis on the decrees of morality and ethos shows the authority of rulers those days. In the aforesaid situation, when inequalities swelled among people, the epic *MM* was in demand to justify their existence discreetly. It is no coincidence that producing such literature, justifying all kinds of oppression when religion has become hand in glove with the state authority. Relatively, the problems faced by women were unlimited. The Vedic Hindu religion discredited the woman by highlighting menstruation. Jainism preached that a woman could attain *mukti* (realisation/salvation) only after taking birth as a male in the very next birth and as a monk in the subsequent birth. Buddhism accepted the tenet in principle that a woman could attain *vīḍupēru* (cessation of birth/salvation) or enlightenment by becoming a nun. That is how the author Cāṭṭaṇār could make a woman, Maṇimēkalai, the heroine of the epic named after her. Giving prominence to an ordinary woman born in *kaṇigaiyar* (courtesan) community, that too in those days, is rather revolutionary. There is a possibility that the epic *MM* is an archetypal literary work written to denote that if anyone, even a woman born in a socially inferior *kaṇigaiyar* community, worships Buddha and accepts the tenets of Buddhism, he/she can attain *mukti*. Keeping Maṇimēkalai as the central character, there are 30 subordinate characters in the epic that spans 30 *kādaigaḷ* (episodes). However, Udayakumāraṇ is exceptional. There are 19 branch-off stories and 23 sub-stories in the epic, which strengthen its main storyline. They take readers to the mystical world, a cluster of super miracles. Deities, such as

Maṇimēkalai, Dīvatilagai and Kandirpāvai, appear frequently and teach what needs to be done next. Whenever Maṇimēkalai develops sexual desire to be a woman, these deities appear and counsel her about the intransigent nature of the body and the greatness of asceticism. Through the stories of past birth, the narrative course of the epic moves into the supernatural sphere. The deity Maṇimēkalai teaches the epic two mantras of becoming a figure of desired and controlling hunger to the heroine Maṇimēkalai. The transformation of Maṇimēkalai, an ordinary human (woman) into the super-powerful mystic woman is carried out through the deities.

Cittirāpati, the mother of Mādhavi, continuously urges her granddaughter Maṇimēkalai, a beauty queen, to lead the life of a courtesan. Describing the mesmerising beauty and excellent attributes of Maṇimēkalai to prince Udayakumāraṇ, Cittirāpati tries to behave according to the custom of her courtesan community by making the prince develop love feelings for her granddaughter. She says:

*aṇitigaḷ nīlattu āymalar ōṭṭiya  
kaḍaimaṇi ugunīr kaṇḍaṇaṇ āyiṇ  
paḍaiyiṭṭu naḍungum kāmaṇ pāvaiyai  
āḍavar kaṇḍāl aḡaralum uṇḍō  
pēḍiyar aṇrō perriyiṇ nīṇriḍiṇ?  
(“Malarvaṇam Pukka Kāḍai”, Lines 21-25)*

If Kāma had seen her loveliness,  
he would have thrown down his weapons and shivered.  
Is it possible for any man to see Maṇimēkalai,  
beautiful as a lovely statue, and leave her?  
If any man sees her and doesn't stay to be near her,  
he must be no man at all.  
(Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>1</sup>

“If any man sees Maṇimēkalai, will he leave her? If he does not want to see her beauty, is he not a *pēḍi* (transvestite) who is unable to experience sexual pleasure with a woman?” Thus proclaims Sudhamati, the *tōḷi* (girlfriend) of Maṇimēkalai. The sketch of characteristics by Cāttaṇār is much nuanced in the realm of

characterisation. It is important information that every man's dream-girl or a damsel like Maṇimēkalai, would forsake everything and become a nun, worshipping the holy feet of Buddha. So, disregarding the bodily features of the beauty queen is described throughout the epic. The penchant of Cāttaṇār in narrating a story, highlighting the physical bodies, has the objective of religiosity. Because of love for Maṇimēkalai, the prince Udayakumārāṇ goes into a flower garden searching for her. In that situation, after putting Maṇimēkalai in the marble hall in the garden and locking her inside, what Sudhamati stated about the body to quieten his sexual passion is important.

*viṇaiyiṇ vandadu viṇaikkuviḷaivu āyadu  
 punaivaṇa nīngiṇ pulālpurattu iḍuvadu  
 mūppuviḷivu uḍaiyadu tīppiṇi irukkai  
 parriṇ parriḍam kurrak koḷkalam  
 purraḍangu araviṇ cerrac cēkkai  
 avalak kavalai kaiyāru, aḷungal  
 tavalā uḷḷam taṇpāl uḍaiyadu  
 makkaḷ yākkai iduveṇa uṇarndu  
 ("Paḷikkaṇai Pukka Kāḍai", Lines 113-120)*

People receive a body because of *karma*,  
 and that body experiences good and bad *karma*.  
 If one takes away its clothes and ornaments,  
 it is only flesh that will be discarded.  
 A body grows old and gets terrible diseases.  
 It desires everything on earth,  
 and does many wrong things.  
 It is filled with anger  
 and is dangerous as a snake pit.  
 Filled with troubles and disabilities,  
 it is unable to make decisions  
 and has a mind that is unsteady.  
 You, great prince, should understand  
 that this is the nature of the human body.  
 (Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>2</sup>

“Without fragrant stuff, the human body has an offensive smell/stink; it has the nature of attaining old age and expiring. It is a house for

terrible diseases. Its heart is filled with pity, worry, bereavement, anger, ferocity.” Thus Sudhamati describes the disgrace of the body.

It is described in “Cakkaravālak Kōṭṭam Uraitta Kāдай” that a small boy named Cārngalaṇ entered a cremation ground by mistake. The description of Cāttaṇār about the plight of a young woman’s corpse does have an intention, which is essayed in subtlety.

*vaḷuvodu kiḍanda puluūṇ piṇḍattu  
alattagam ūṭṭiya aḍinari vāykkonḍu  
ulappil iṇbamōḍu ulaikkum ōḍaiyum  
kalaippura algul kaḷugukudaṇḍu unḍu  
nilaittalai neḍuvīḷi eḍukkum ōḍaiyum  
kaḍagam ceṇḍa kaiyait tīnāy  
uḍaiyak kavvi ōḍungā ōḍaiyum  
cāṇdam tōynda ēṇḍiḷa vaṇamulai  
kāyṇḍapaci eruvai kavarnḍūṇ ōḍaiyum  
paṇbukoḷ yākkaiyiṇ veṇṇali arangattu  
(“Cakkaravālak Kōṭṭam Uraitta Kāдай”, Lines 109-118)*

In that burning ground,  
he saw a female *Bhudam* on a platform  
and he heard many noises:  
a fox carrying meat in its mouth made a happy noise,  
an eagle eating the flesh of a corpse’s stomach made a noise,  
a wild dog took the hand of a corpse  
and ran about making a racket,  
a vulture took the flesh of a corpse’s chest,  
ate it and made a noise.  
All these sounds were like drums on that burning ground.  
(Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>3</sup>

A fox holding the decorated red coloured feet of a young woman, whose body is swarmed by worms, in its mouth and hovelled with a happy note; an eagle, deeply beaking/nipping the loins of the woman, crowed; a dog, holding the bracelet of her hand, barked; a hawk, eating her tendered breasts, made a noise. And a ghost, besides taking the corpse’s head, thickened of dark hair, plucked the eyes of the corpse, ate it and danced. Thus the description continues. Describing the

falling-off nature of the beautiful body of a young woman in such a manner by Cāttaṇār is not only the culmination of perversion but also constructs the disgraceful image of the woman in terms of body.

As Udayakumāraṇ develops love feelings for Maṇimēkalai, he pursues and tries to convey his love to her. In that context, Maṇimēkalai (who was in the disguised form of a woman named Kāyaśaṇḍigai), who wants to reveal the ephemeral nature of youth, shows him an old lady with grey hair and withered condition. This description serves as the chronicle concerning a woman's body. She tells him, "See, her hair that was coloured like black sand has changed to the colour of white sand. See, her forehead that was like a crescent moon is now wrinkled. See, how her eyebrows that were shaped like bows and attracted others, have begun to resemble dried fish. Her eyes that were like *kaḷunīr* (red water-lily) flowers are now filled with impure water. Her nose was like a *kumil* (Asian Bush beech) flower, now drips with water. Her teeth that were like pearls, now look like *surai* (Bottle Gourd) seeds. Her red lips that were like flower petals, are dried and smell like meat when she smiles. Her lovely ears that were once like *vallai* (Bindweed) flowers look like dried meat. Her ample breasts have grown flaccid and look like empty bags. Her arms that were once supple as bamboo, have become like branches of a palm tree, bending and falling. Her fingers have become thin with shrunken skin, her nails are falling off. Her thighs that were like plantain trunks have grown thin and look like dried-up screw pine bushes. Her knees and back are fleshless, showing her nerves and bones. Her feet look like dried coconuts. Oh prince, you do not realize how this disgusting body can be covered with flowers and sandal fragrance, and decorated with clothes and ornaments. This is what an ornamented body is and this is the nature of the body when it becomes old. You do not know this, Oh innocent prince." ("Udayakumāraṇai Vālāl Eṇinda Kāḍai, Lines 41-70). Thus, through the heroine Maṇimēkalai, the author Cāttaṇār divulges his critical views on the fleeting nature of the woman's beautiful body. He censures that it is a deceitful act



of our ancestors who evoked passion in the hearts of people over woman's body, which is foul-smelling but concealing this fact, they eulogised the body as flower-like tendered and sandal-smelling, etc. Cāttaṇār's allegations against human bodies, especially a woman's body which is part and parcel of nature, are nauseating. A woman, who is capable of reproducing progenies, has the nature of loving her entire family, children and others. The male-chauvinistic mind, with no understanding of a woman's mind, approaches her as a mere assemblage of body parts and exhibits itself as abusive. Presentation of the disgrace image of a woman's body through a woman Maṇimēkalai has embedded micropolitics. The existence of human beings on earth is fully centred around the physical body. Religions occupy the first place in classifying the body, by denying the pleasures of the senses that serve as the source for the merriments of bodies. For gaining authority over the public, the myth regarding "heaven", believed as existing somewhere at a faraway place, mythologies about God and loathing of bodies are presented in the epic. Women's bodies have been employed in the epic to destruct one's consciousness over the body and also to create the mindset of rebuffing bodies among people.

The disgrace of limiting entire females as mere entities of the body is also featured in the epic, to give prominence to Maṇimēkalai, born in the courtesan community. It is normal for the human body to grow and transform differently at every stage. But transgressions carried out by Cāttaṇār on the physical bodies of women with the construction of binary opposition i.e. young woman's body /vs. old woman's body is immeasurable.

Generally, there has been a long-standing notion that it is important to create and talk about great aspects of the Tamil literary tradition. The politics of surveillance subtly functions in every author's mind, what to talk about and whatnot. As far as the Cāttaṇār is concerned, he has tried to bring the marginalised people into the story. The scenes witnessed by Maṇimēkalai and Sudhamati on the street while proceeding to the flower garden to gather flowers have the potential

of creating discourses on oppressed people. The scenes unfolding the trio—a drunkard, a eunuch, and a psychopath—highlight a new trend in the realm of ancient Tamil literature, consisting of two categories of dance viz. *vēttiyaḷ* (The branch relating to *Akam* in the dramatic compositions) and *poduviyaḷ* (The branch relating to *Puram* in the dramatic compositions).

A Jaina monk with a dirty body, who is on fast, walks naked on the street. Then a drunkard, who saw him, bows down and requests to listen to his petty utterance.

*aḷukkuḍai yākkaiyil pugundu nummuyir  
 pulukkaraip paṭṭōr pōṇṇuḷam varundādu  
 immaiḡum maṇumaiḡum iṇṇuḍiyil iṇṇamum  
 taṇṇvayin tarūum eṇṭalaimagaṇ uraittadu  
 kolaḡum uṇḍō, kolumaḍal teṇṇiṇ  
 viḷaipūn tēraliṇ meyttavat tūrē!  
 Uṇḍu telindiv yōgattu urupayaṇ  
 kaṇḍāl emmaiḡum kaiyudir koṇṇeṇa  
 (“Malarvaṇam Pukka Kāḍai”, Lines 94-101)*

“O monk, I worship your lotus feet. Hear my words.  
 You should not walk, suffering with a dirty body.  
 Our guru has taught us that present and future births,  
 the end of life and the joy of *moksha*  
 will all come according to one’s *karma*.  
 The soul in our body will not suffer  
 as if it were locked in a hot room.  
 Is anything wrong with drinking the sweet toddy  
 that comes from palm trees?  
 If one drinks toddy is it killing anything?  
 You do true *tapas*!  
 If you eat and drink like me  
 and find that the joy of that is better  
 than the results of *yoga* that you do,  
 why don’t you start drinking?  
 If you find this is not true,  
 then do not accept me as your disciple.  
 But if you find that it is true, you should accept me.”

He made this bet with him as some onlookers stood  
 And looked at the drunkard and the monk.  
 (Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>4</sup>

“The soul in your dirty body is suffering like a being locked in a hot room. I have medicine that would cure those suffering. If you drink the toddy of the Palmyra tree, the suffering of your life will vanish. This toddy will give the pleasure of *immai* (this birth), *marumai* (next birth), and *vīdupēru* (salvation) to those who attain the status of self-existence. Does the sweet toddy contain the act of killing? After drinking the toddy and relishing its taste, if you still find it befits your ascetic way of life, you can discount the toddy and me as useless things”. One cannot easily overlook this dialogue of the drunkard with the Jaina monk. What the drunkard (who is raptured and excited by drinking the toddy) desires to emphasize to the monk (who suppresses his body by fasting) is the greatness of the body. Though the conversation of the drunkard seems to be a parody, it can also be regarded as a reaction to the notion of the body conceived by Jainism.

The next scene portraying certain minute facts of a crazy man is also fascinating.

*kaṇavira mālaiyiṇ kaṭṭiya tiraṇpuyan*  
*kuvimugiḷ erukkiṇ kōtta mālaiyaṇ*  
*cidaval tuṇiyoḍu cēṇōngu neḍuñcinait*  
*tadarvīlbu ṍḍittuk kaṭṭiya uḍaiyiṇaṇ*  
*veṇpali cāndam meymmuludu urīp*  
*paṇbil kiḷavi palaroḍum uraittāngu*  
*aḷūum viḷūum araṇṇum kūum*  
*toḷūum eḷūum cuḷalalum cuḷalum*  
*ōḍalum ṍḍum orucirai oḍungi*  
*nīḍalum nīḍum niḷaloḍu maṇalum*  
*maiyaḷ urra magan ..... ..*  
 (“Malarvaṇam Pukka Kāḍai”, Lines 104-114)

A crazy man was wearing *alari* garlands  
 made of buds and *erukkam* flowers on his arms.  
 His clothes were made of leaves and  
 stalks from branches of trees.

His whole body was smeared with  
 pure sandalwood paste and white ashes.  
 He talked to the people around him rudely.  
 He cried, fell, babbled, and screamed.  
 He bowed to them, got up,  
 wandered all about, and ran here and there.  
 He ran a long time, ending in a corner  
 where he saw his shadow and became confused.  
 (Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>5</sup>

The madman, who wears garland, made of *alari* (Oleander) flowers, has hung on the chest with *erukkampū* (Crown flower). He has inserted twigs into the worn-out clothes; has applied holy ash, and sandal paste over his body; has uttered vulgar words to several people; cried, fell, bewailed, yelled, raised hands in reverence, rolled, whirled, ran and stood aside. Having witnessed the mindless action of the madman's dysfunctional mind spontaneously acting on the street, people stay behind him with distress. This is an example of how the social system of majorities for ages belittles a person who digresses with the common ethos as insane.

The mental anguish of transgender people, who have a male's body but with a female's feeling, are immeasurable. In the male-dominated society where female's bodies are assumed as a mere commodity of enjoyment and disregarded based on sexual orientation, there is no place for discourse on transgender bodies. The remarks on *aravāṇi* (transgender) referred to as *pēḍi* (transvestite) by Cāttaṇār are worth mentioning.

*curiyal tāḍi, maruḷpaḍu pūṇkuḷal*  
*pavaḷac cevṇāyt tavaḷa vāḷnagai*  
*ōḷḷari neḍuṅkaṇ velliven tōḷṭu*  
*karuṅkoḍip puruvattu marunguvaḷai pīrainudal*  
*kāntaḷam ceṅkai ēndiḷa vaṇamulai*  
*agaṇṇa algul amnuṇ maruṅgul*  
*iganda vaṭṭuḍai eḷuḍuvarik kōlattu*  
*vāṇaṇ pērūr maruḡiḍait tōṇṇi*  
*nīṇilam aḷandōṇ maganmun āḍiya*

*pēḍik kōlattup pēḍukāṇ gunarum*

(“Malarvaṇam Pukka Kāḍai”, Lines 116-125)

Dressed as beautiful *Mohini*,  
 the form assumed by Thirumal to cheat the *Asuras*  
 when the milky ocean was churned.  
 His hair was dark, curly and decorated with flowers,  
 his mouth was red as coral,  
 his teeth were white and shiny,  
 and his bright long eyes were lined with red.  
 He had dark bending eyebrows  
 and his forehead was like the crescent moon.  
 His lovely red hands were like *kāndaḷ* blossoms,  
 his young beautiful breasts were round,  
 and his waist was broad and thin.  
 His arms were painted and his dress  
 hung down only to his knees.  
 (Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>6</sup>

“Dark and curly hair, coral-like reddened mouth, white teeth, bright long eyes with red lines, dark curved eyebrows, crescent moon-like forehead, fingers like flame lily flowers, projected beautiful breasts, widened loins, slim waist, dressed hung down to knees”. It is in the *Maṇimēkalai*, such a fabulous description of *pēḍi* has been featured for the first time. “A *pēḍi* has played the *pēḍikkūttu* (dance of transvestite)”. By this account, we come to know that transgenders have also excelled in the art of dance performance. The Cāttaṇār, having the attitude of remarking the anti-opinions because of the prevailing religious dissension, has positively accounted for the social reactions over the disregarded men viz. drunkard, madman, and transvestite. Based on the following notions of Buddhism that “All beings of the world should be treated equally” and “All beings should be loved” with the sense of sympathy, these characters have been featured in the epic.

The nature of some people who live detached from the main society is also accounted for in *MM*. The condition of minds of the people who stay in the cremation ground is worth examining.

*cuḍalai nōṇbigaḷ ḍḍiyā ullamoḍu*  
*maḍaitī urukkum vaṇṇi maṇṇamum*  
*virada yākkaiyar uḍaitalai toguttāngu*  
*iruntoḍar paḍukkum iratti maṇṇamum*  
*piṇamtiṇ māḱkaḷ niṇampaḍu kuḷiciyil*  
*virundāṭṭu ayaṇum veḷḷiḍai maṇṇamum*  
 (“Cakkaravāḷakkōṭṭam Uraitta Kāḍai”, Lines 86-91)

In Vanni mandram, sages on the burning grounds  
 make fires ceaselessly.

In Irathi mandram,  
 sages, doing penance and fasting  
 collect the heads and arrange them.

In Vellidai mandram  
 people cook the fat of the dead in pots  
 and have a feast.  
 (Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>7</sup>

These stanzas account the facts about the three men of those days: *Kāpālikas*, who perform penance at the cremation ground, *Bairavas*, who wear the garland of skulls and the crazy men, who eat the corpse. The courage of *Kāpālikas* and *Bairavas*, who stay and observe penance at the cremation ground, which is generally disliked and discounted out of fear by people, is, in a sense, a challenge given to the public mind/collective psyche. Doesn't it sound bizarre to live in a cremation ground, wear a garland made of skulls, and eat the corpse, highlighting/justifying some kind of *vrata* (religious observance) or penance?

Sexual issues such as extramarital relationships, incest, and rape have also been featured in *MM*. The planned act of revenge by Rājamāḍēvi (the Queen) towards Maṇimēkalai, as she was, in a way, responsible for the murder of her son prince Udayakumāraṇ, is simply shocking.

*kallā ilaiṇṇaṇ oruvaṇaik kūuy*  
*vallāṅguc ceydu maṇimē kalaitaṇ*  
*iṇaivaḷar ilamulai ēṇḍelil āgattup,*

*punarkuṛi ceydu porundiṇaḷ ennum*  
*pāṇmaik kaṭṭurai palarkkurai enrē*  
*kāṇam palavum kainiṛai koḍuppa*  
*āṅgavaṇ cenṛav āyiḷai irunda*  
*pāṅgil oruciṛaip pāḍucenṛu aṇaidalum*  
 (“Cīraiviḍu Kādai”, Lines 43-50)

The queen did not stop.  
 She called an uneducated man,  
 gave him gold coins and asked him to go  
 and tell all the people  
 that Maṇimēkalai had embraced him  
 and her breasts had marked his chest.  
 The man sent by the queen went to the temple  
 where Maṇimēkalai was.  
 (Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>8</sup>

Rājamādēvi calls an illiterate young man and says, “Rape Maṇimēkalai. Carve out some marks on her breasts. Tell the public that you have embraced her”. Having said so, she handovers him a handful of gold coins. Coming to know this, Maṇimēkalai escapes from him by taking the form of the man. The queen of the kingdom herself arranging a man and giving him some gold coins to rape a young woman is the sign of the power politics of the day. The attempt of sexual harassment featured in the epic *MM* is a sign of the change of the life of the Sangam days, which put forth the wilful romantic co-existence of a man and a woman.

Presumed as happened in the ancient Tamil society of the past, the story of *MM*, highlighting the cruelty of a queen, unfolds further. In this context, Maṇimēkalai tells the queen the story of a boy who loved his mother as follows:

*ālḃavar kalakkura mayangiya nalnāṭṭuk*  
*kāruga maḍandai kaṇavaṇum kaiviḍa*  
*īṇṛa kuḷaviyōḍu tāṇvē rāgi*  
*maṇṛōr dicaipōy varaivāḷ vāḷvulip*  
*pudalvaṇ taṇṇaiyōr purinūl mārbaṇ*

*padiyōr ariyāp pāṇmaiyaṇ vaḷarkka*  
*āṅgap pudalvaṇ avalitiram ariyāṇ*  
*tāṇpuṇarndu arindupiṇ taṇṇuyir nīttadum*  
 (“Ciraiviḍu Kādai”, Lines 104-111)

A housewife left her country  
 because there was trouble in the kingdom.  
 Her husband also left her at the same time  
 leaving her alone and pregnant.  
 When she arrived in another city by walking,  
 she gave birth to a small boy  
 and, because she did not know how to take care of him,  
 she left him and went on a different way.  
 She left the child in a village  
 and a Brahmin wearing a sacred thread  
 took the child, thinking it was an orphan, and raised it.  
 The village people did not know  
 where the child had come from.

The boy did not know his mother  
 and he grew up in the village as a Brahmin.  
 He became involved with his mother  
 without knowing that she was his mother  
 and had a relationship with her,  
 but when he knew it was his mother that he loved,  
 he gave up his life.  
 (Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>9</sup>

The prosperity of a country has declined due to the incompetent rule of the king. In that critical situation, a man abandons his wife named Kārugamaḍandai. After some time, she gives birth to a male child. As she is unable to take care of the child, she abandons him and starts living as a prostitute in that town. Upon finding an orphaned child, a Brahmin takes him to his home and grows him up. When the boy attains adulthood, he develops a sexual desire for that woman. Without knowing that she is his mother, he had sexual intercourse with her once. He gives up his life instantly when he comes to know that the lady is his own mother with whom he had sex. The story narrated by



Maṇimēkalai to the queen makes her realise that lust, which naturally arises among humans, can cause utter evils. This story reveals that lust involves the possibility that anything can happen. The story of Kārugamaṇḍandai illustrates the fact that there is also a possibility of a socially tabooed act to take place.

A Brahmin woman Sāli, abandoning her husband, becomes pregnant as a result of having a sexual relationship with another man. Fearing punishment for her improper conduct, she leaves her newborn child in a garden on her way to Kumari Sea. Seeing the child being raised by a cow by feeding its milk, ḷampūdi - a Brahmin, takes away the child to his home and starts raising him. One day the grown-up boy Āputtiraṇ (a son of a cow) sees a cow tied to a post to be sacrificed by Brahmins in *yagñā* (Vedic fire). He releases it from the post and eventually saves it from butchering. The enraged Brahmins hit him black and blue for releasing the cow. Also, they scold him vehemently saying that he is a child of a cow. Āputtiraṇ then says, “What was wrong with him! When Asalaṇ is born to a cow, Sringi to a deer and Kēsha Kambhaḷaṇ to a fox, and all of them were revered as *muṇivarga!* (Ascetics), what was wrong with him called Āputtiraṇ, having been raised by a cow? He further raises a question, “Were not Vashistha, the ever first patriarch of the seer clan, and Agastya sage born to Brahma and Tilottama, a prostitute?” The questions put forth by the author Cāttaṇār in the epic to criticise Vedic Hinduism, mythifying the caste hierarchy as pragmatic are nuanced.

It is mentioned that Ādirai is the first woman to be qualified to offer food in the rare *aṭcaya pāttiram* (a mythical vessel which never becomes empty of food) obtained by Maṇimēkalai. Cāduvaṇ, the husband of Ādirai, a woman known for chastity, abandons her and spends some period with a courtesan. Thereby, he loses all his wealth. So, when he goes in a vessel along with some people to an alien country to earn wealth, the ship is caught in a hurricane and he is washed ashore. Some men, who survived the accident, unaware of his existence, tell her that he has died in the hurricane accident. On

hearing the news, Ādirai lits fire in the graveyard and enters it. But the fire does not touch her. She later lives with her husband. Branding it as the hallmark of a woman, who lays down her precious life for her husband who had forsaken her and ruined the wealth of the family by his immoral relationship with a prostitute, conflicts with the feminist point of view.

Thinking of and waiting for him patiently, and getting killed herself after learning about the death of the husband, even if he happened to be a rogue, a scoundrel, but branding this trait as the hallmark of a chaste woman by shortening her into a mere body is nothing but a trick to confine her constantly within the clutches of a man. Cāttaṇār's invention of the magical bowel called *aṭcaya pāttiram* to solve the food problem of those men, who are hungry for the next meal is the highpoint of exorcism. The information that people wretched in hunger while destitute men waiting for food at the Cakkaravāḷak Kōṭṭam, is the report of people suffering in poverty at that time. Cāttaṇār, who denotes the hunger as "*pacippiṇi eṇṇum pāvi*" ("Hunger is an evil sickness), ("Pāttiram Perṛa Kāḍai", Line 80), has mentioned a means to solve the hunger as well by saying, "*uṇḍi koḍuttōr uyir koḍuttōrē*" ("Giving food is giving life").

*ārṛā mākkaḷ arumpaci kaḷaivōr*  
*mēṛṛē ulagiṇ meyneṛi vāḷkkai*  
 ("Pāttiram Perṛa Kāḍai", Lines 93-94)

Living by giving food to hungry people, doing charity,  
 and removing the hunger of the poor who cannot find food,  
 is the way to live a true life on the earth.  
 (Tr.: Kausalya Hart)<sup>10</sup>

From the above quoted lines, we realise that the real trait of the world's life is that of adhering to the path of those men who appease the hunger of people, who are unable to get rid of the disease called "hunger". The discourse of Cāttaṇār, about beings' basic problem of hunger and attempt to explore the means of eradicating the same while narrating a story in epic form and chronicling Buddha's teaching:

“One should have pity and compassion for the world beings” is the construction on the basis of “Love”.

The episodes such as “Camayakkaṇakkartam Tīram Kēṭṭa Kādai” (“Episode of Learning about the Proficiency of Philosophers”), Tavattīram Pūṇḍu Dharumam Kēṭṭa Kādai” (“Episode of Learning Dharma from Aṟavāṇar”), and “Bhavattīram Aṟugeṇap Pāvai Nōṟra Kādai” (“Episode of Maṇimēkalai forsaking attachments and sitting on Penance”), that are featured at the end of *MM* text, are not in harmony with the storyline of the epic and seem to be merely serving religious propaganda.

The *Maṇimēkalai* epic has not projected the life of ancient Tamils greatly, though it has made a woman Maṇimēkalai, born in the courtesan community, as the heroine of epic since it was composed to propagate the Buddhist religious tenets. Besides troubling the human’s physical bodies, the source of human’s existence on earth, treating them as contemptuous entities, has the backdrop of religious ideology. The accounts of marginalised people, men suffering from hunger and finding *aṭcaya pāttiram* to stamp out the hunger, are the special features of the epic *MM*. Because of the limitless supernatural events and the story’s unfolding episodes that have been featured in the epic *Maṇimēkalai* could not be regarded as the continuity of the first Tamil epic *Cilappatikāram*. Finally, taking everything into account, a question arises, is *Maṇimēkalai* an original Tamil epic or not?

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### Notes

For all numbers of Notes i.e., 1 to 10:

[https://www.projectmadurai.org/pm\\_etexts/utf8/pmuni0710.html](https://www.projectmadurai.org/pm_etexts/utf8/pmuni0710.html)

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## Glossary

(Translation of Unique Tamil Terms/Phrases)

### A

*adigāram* - power

*aḍimaigaḷ* - slaves

*aintiṇai* - five landscapes

*aivaṇam* - mountain paddy

*akam* - interior (feeling)

*akavālvu* - interior life

*agattiṇai* - Interior Landscape

*alari* - oleander

*algul* - loins

*alli arici* - lily seeds

*amarar selvaṇ* - son of celestials

*anangu* - harmful mountain deity/devil

*ananguḍai munnīr* - the ocean that has fierce deity

*aṇanguḍai neḍuvarai* - tall mountains holding a fierce deity

*aṇanguḍai varaippu* - mountains holding a fierce deity

*aṇanguṟu karpu* - deified chastity

*andaṇar* - Brahmins

*aṇbiṇ aintiṇai* - five-fold interior landscapes

*aṇṇil paravai* - Glossy Ibis

*aṇṇil kūṟram* - God of Death without justice

*aṟam* - virtue

*aṟangaḷ* - virtues

*arasu* - government

*aravāṇi* - transgender

*aṟivu melliyaḷ* - soft natured wise woman

*aruṅāṇ kōvil* - Arhat temple

*arumarai* - sacred Vedas

*arundati aṇaiya karpu* - chastity like that of Arundati

*aṟṟait tingaḷ* - last month

*aṟcaya pāttiram* - a mythical vessel which never becomes empty of food

*avisāri* - prostitute

*ayyaṇ* - Lord

*āḍal magaḷ* - dancing-girl

*āḍishesaṇ* - a mythological thousand-headed serpent

*āḡupeyar* - metonymy

*ālamaram* - Banyan tree

*āmbal* - white water lily

*āṇmai* - manliness

*āṇirai kavardal* - cattle lifting

*āṇirai mīṭṭal* - cattle-retrieving

*āṟu* - river

*āyar* - herdsmen



*āyiṇum* - even/if  
*āyiram kaṅgaḷ uḍaiyōṇ* - holder  
 of one thousand eyes

## C

*caḍangugaḷ* - rituals  
*caṇḍiyar* - rogue  
*cīriyakaḷ* - little toddy  
*cīrriṇbam* - petty pleasure  
*cīrukalam* - small vessel  
*cīrukalattu uguppavum* - to be  
 poured on small vessel  
*cīrūr maṇṇargaḷ* - chiefs of small  
 towns

## E

*eccam* - infinitive  
*emaṇ* - God of Death  
*endai* - my father/my lord  
*eḷuttāḷaṇ* - writer  
*eḷuttuvaiyal* - sesame chutney  
*eripuṇak kuṛavaṇ* - burning  
 fields' mountain dwellers  
*erukkampū* - crown flower  
*eyiṇar* - desert hunting tribes  
*ēvalargaḷ* - servants

## G

*gaṇam* - class  
*garudaṇ* - eagle, the vehicle of  
 Viṣṇu

## I

*idaiccol* - particle  
*ilaijñāṇ* - young man/youth  
*ilai kaḷaidal* - removal of  
 ornaments  
*immai* - this birth

*iṇakkuḷu* - an ethnic tribe/  
 an ethnic community  
*iṇakkuḷut talaivargaḷ* - chiefs of  
 ethnic tribes  
*iṇakkuḷu vīram* - gallantry/valour  
 of ethnic community  
*irumpāṇar* - great bards  
*irrait tingaḷ* - this month

## K

*kaḍal* - sea  
*kaḍal nīrāḍudal* - bathing in sea  
 waters  
*kaḍambar* - unruly persons  
*kaḍarḱarai* - seashore  
*kaḍalkeḷu selvi* - ocean goddess  
*kaḍaiyeḷu vaḷḷalgaḷ* - last seven  
 patrons  
*kaḍavuḷ karpu* - devout/pious  
 chastity  
*kaimmai* - widowhood  
*kaimmai nōṇbu* - widowhood  
 fasting  
*kaitoludu ētti* - hands joined  
 together and raised with  
 respect  
*kalaiviyiṇbam* - pleasure of  
 sexual intercourse  
*kalangik kaiyarṛu* - baffled with  
 helpless  
*kallāḍavar* - illiterates  
*kalvi* - education  
*kaḷavolukkam* - clandestine love  
 conduct  
*kaḷiyāṭṭangaḷ* - exultations  
*kaḷudu* - demon  
*kaḷimugam* - river-mouth/  
 backwater

- kaḷunīr* - red water-lily  
*kaṇṇi* - a virgin/an unmarried young woman  
*kaṇigaiyar* - courtesan  
*kaṇigaiyar kulam* - courtesan community  
*kaiyaṟunilai* - state of being helpless and distressed/ bereavement situation  
*kaiyaṟunilait tuṟai* - situation that deals with mourning situation  
*karipura viṟagu* - charred wood tips  
*kariya malar* - black flower  
*karpu* - chastity  
*karpolukkam* - chaste love conduct  
*karuvayiṟu* - uterus  
*karandai* - cattle-retrieving  
*karṟavar* - learned men  
*kaviṇar* - poet  
*kādal* - romantic love  
*kādal koṇḍāṭṭangaḷ* - love merriments  
*kādaigaḷ* - episodes  
*kādal molī* - romantic love-language  
*kādalan* - lover  
*kādarparattai* - lovelorn mistress  
*kāḍu* - forest  
*kāḍurai deyvam* - forest-dwelling deity  
*kāmaṇ* - Kāṁdev, the God of Love  
*kāmam* - lust > love  
*kāmakkalai* - art of sex  
*kāmakkilatti* - lustful woman/ passionate concubine  
*kāmanōy* - disease of lust/illness of passion  
*kāṇakkurvargaḷ* - forest-dwelling fowlers  
*kār kālam* - rainy season  
*kāriruḷ* - thick darkness  
*kārmēgam* - black cloud  
*kiḷatti* - legitimate wife  
*kiḷavaṇ* - legitimate husband  
*kiṇaippaṟai* - large size leather drum  
*kiṇaivar* - drummers who beat *kiṇaippaṟai*, a drum or tabor of the agricultural tract  
*koṇḍi magaḷir* - enslaved women > harlots  
*kuḍi* - family/clan  
*kuḍipperumai* - pride of family/ clan  
*kuḍiyiṇ talaivaṇ* - lord of the community  
*kuḍumbam* - family  
*kuḍumbappen* - family/domestic woman  
*kuḍumbat talaivi* - head of the family  
*kuladeyvam* - tutelary deity  
*kuḷam* - pond  
*kuḷu* - community  
*kumiḷ* - Asian Bush beech  
*kuṇṇrak kuṟavargaḷ* - mountain-dwellers  
*kuṟappen* - fowler woman  
*kuṟavar* - hill tribe fowlers  
*kuravaikkūttu* - dance in a circle prevalent among the women of hill tracts

*kuri colludal* - astragalomancy/  
fortune-telling  
*kuriñci* - mountain region  
*kurunittinai* - a variety of millet  
*kuruntoḍi magalir* - women with  
small bangles  
*kurunila manṇan* - chieftain/lord  
of a small region  
*kurram* - crime  
*kūdirkkālam* - dew season/cold  
season  
*kūrruvaṇ* - God of Death  
*kūttar* - actors/dancers  
of traditional theatre  
performance  
*kūṭṭukkalippu* - conjoint  
merriment

## M

*maḍamā* - soft natured animal  
*maḍamagaḷ* - unwise girl/  
soft speaking woman  
*maḍanaḍai* - soft walking  
*magatpāl kāñci* - war ensuing  
from seeking a girl in  
marriage  
*magiḷndu uṇṇum* - to consume  
happily  
*malai* - mountain/hill  
*malaiccuṇai* - mountain spring  
*malaittoḍar* - mountain ghats  
*maiviḍai vīlppavum* - slaughter  
male goats  
*maṇaivi* - wife  
*mandiram* - a form of exorcism/  
a mystical verse  
*maṇpadaḷ* - humanity/army

*maṇṇar* - chieftains/lords of  
small regions/kings  
*maṇakkkuḍi magalir* - women of  
warrior tribes  
*maṇaikāppālar* - guardians of  
Vedas  
*marāmaram* - Mangrove tree  
*maṇaikāppālar* - guardians of  
Vedas  
*maṇam* - valour  
*marudam* - cultivable land/  
agricultural tract  
*maruda nila makkaḷ* - people of  
agricultural tracts  
*marudu* - Arjun tree  
*maṇumai* - next birth  
*maruttuvam* - medicine/treatment  
*maṭṭuvāy tirappavum* - as opened  
wine jars  
*māyōṇ* - Viṣṇu  
*meyyuru puṇarcci* - physical  
intercourse  
*mudirkaṇṇi* - aged spinster  
*mudumoli* - adage  
*muduvēṇil* - peak summer  
*mukkaṇṇaṇ* - Three eyed God  
Śiva  
*mulai* - breast  
*mullai* - jasmine >  
patient waiting  
*mullaikkoḍi* - jasmine vine  
*mullai mālai* - evening time  
when jasmine blooms  
*mullai nilam* - forest region/  
sylvan tracts  
*mullai meṇkoḍi* - delicate jasmine  
vine

*mullaiyam puravu* - woodland  
 with jasmine  
*mullait tiṇai* - forest region  
*muduvāyp pāṇar* - bards with  
 ancient wisdom/fortune  
 telling bards  
*muñṇaikkārai* - a kind of spinach  
*muṇḍacci* - widow  
*muracam* - large drum  
*Murugu* - Lord Murugaṇ  
*muṇivargaḷ* - ascetics  
*mūdiṇ mullai magalir* - senior  
 women of ancient warrior  
 tribes  
*mūvēṇḍar* - three emperors/kings

## N

*naḍukargaḷ* - memorial stones  
*naḍukal valipāḍu* - tombstone/  
 memorial stone worship  
*naṇbaṇ* - male friend  
*narandam nārum* - fragrance of  
 orange  
*naṇirun kūṇḍal* - fragrant dark  
 hair  
*nayaṇil kūṇram* - God of Death  
 without mercy  
*nāḍu* - country  
*nāṇmarai* - four Vedas  
*nāṇmarai mudalvar* - supremoes  
 of four Vedas  
*nāṇmaraip pulavar* - composers  
 of four Vedas  
*nāṇmugaṇ* - Lord Brahma  
*nerimuraigaḷ* - moral principles  
*neydal* - seashore region/  
 maritime tracts

*nilam* - land  
*nilamagaḷ* - Goddess of Earth  
*nimittam* - omen  
*nīlamaṇi* - blue sapphire  
*nīrccōru* - boiled rice mixed with  
 water  
*nīrnilaigaḷ* - water bodies  
*nīrvār kaṇ* - eyes with tears

## O

*olukkam* - good conduct/virtue  
*oṇṇayiru* - shining sun  
*opparra jñani* - unparalleled wise  
 man  
*ōḍukāli* - girl/woman of loose  
 morals who runs away from  
 home  
*ōmai* - Elephant apple tree

## P

*pacippini ennum pāvi* - hunger is  
 an evil sickness  
*pacuṇkadirt tingaḷ* - cool rays  
 moon  
*paṇai* - palmyra tree  
*paṇṇiru purattiṇai* - twelve  
 exterior landscape genre  
*paṇitturai* - water port  
*paradavar* - fishermen  
*parai* - drum  
*paraiyar* - drummers/pariahs  
*parattamai* - adultery/infidelity  
 of a man  
*parattai* - concubine/mistress/  
 prostitute  
*paravar* - fishermen  
*paricilar iranga* - grieving gift-  
 mongers

*parisam* - gift of cash, jewels,  
etc.

*pattiṇi* - chaste wife

*pattiṇik kaḍavuḷ* - Goddess of  
Chastity

*pāḍiṇi* - songstress, a woman of  
*pāṇar* community

*pāḍiṇiyar* - female singers

*pālai* - desert region/barren  
region or track

*pāliyal virupam* - sexual desire

*pāluṟavu* - sexual intercourse

*pāṇaṇ* - bard/minstrel

*pāṇar* - bards/minstrels

*pāṇar marabu* - minstrels'  
lineage

*peṇmai* - womanhood

*peṇmoḷi* - feminine language

*periyakaḷ* - lots of toddy

*perumpūṇ* - huge gold ornaments

*peruñcōru* - lots of rice

*peṭṭāngu iṟum* - giving desired  
gifts

*peyar eccam* - relative participle

*pēḍi* - transvestite

*pēḍikkūttu* - dance of transvestite

*pēy* - ghost

*pīli cūṭṭi* - adorned of peacock  
feather

*poduviyal tiṇai* - general  
landscape genre

*polantār* - gold garland

*ponpunai tigiri* - wheels made of  
gold

*poludu* - season

*poruḷ* - wealth

*porunar* - a community of bards/  
valiant men

*pōr* - battle/war

*pulavar* - philosopher-poet

*pulavar marabu* - poets' lineage

*pulavu nārum* - stench of meat

*puṇarcci* - sexual intercourse

*puram* - exterior (action)

*purattiṇai* - exterior landscape  
genre

*puravālvu* - exterior life

*puravu* - pastoral land

*pūṭṭa mullai* - bloomed jasmine

## S

*surai* - Bottle Gourd

*sūli* - Goddess Durga

*sūr* - malignant demon

*sūrccuṇai* - fierce spring

*sūrmagaḷ* - female fiend

## T

*taḍāri* - medium sized leather  
drum

*talaivaṇ* - hero, a dramatic  
persona

*talaivi* - heroine, a dramatic  
persona

*taṇikkudumbam* - independent  
family

*Tamiḷ Marai* - Tamil Veda

*taṭṭuvāṇi* - prostitute

*tākkaṇangu* - attacking deity

*tāymai* - motherhood

*tāyvalic camūgam* - matrilineal  
society

*tēvaḍiyāl* - prostitute

*tuḍi* - a small drum shaped like  
an hour glass

*tuḍiyar* - drummers who beat

*tiṇai* - landscape genre/foxtail  
millet

*tiṇaik kōṭpāḍu* - Theory of  
poetical landscape

*tiṇaicār vālkkai* - landscape-  
oriented life

*tiṇtēr* - sturdy chariot

*tiraṇiṇri tuṇiya* - without sense  
but bold

*Tirumāl* - Viṣṇu

*tīmai* - evil

*tolpaṇkuḍi* - ancient aboriginal  
tribe

*tolpaṇkuḍiyiṇar* - people of  
ancient aboriginal tribe

*tōḷi* - girlfriend

*turakkattu amarar selvaṇ* - son of  
celestials of heaven

*turai* - situation

## U

*uḍaimai* - wealth

*uḍanpōkku* - elopement

*ulagaḥ podumaṇai* - Universal  
Scripture

*umaṇar* - salt-makers

*uṇavup paṅgīḍu* - sharing of food

*ūr* - dwelling place/village/home  
town

## V

*vaḍakku iruttal* - sitting on fast to  
death facing towards the north

*vaḍamīṇ pōla karpu* - chastity  
like that of the Northern Pole  
Star

*vaḷaimuṇi cidara* - bangles  
broken scattered

*vaḷḷai* - Bindweed

*vallāṇ mullai* - position of robust  
man

*valvēl cāṭṭaṇ* - Cāṭṭan with strong  
spear

*vaṇḍumūcu kaṇṇi* - garland with  
bees swarming

*varagu* - kodo millet

*varaiyara magaḷir* - goddesses  
dwelling in mountains

*varaiyāḍugaḷ* - nilgiri tahrs/  
rock-goats

*vāḍupaci* - hunger-starve

*vāgai* - Siris/Koko tree

*vāyāḍi* - talkative girl/woman

*venkuḍai* - white umbrella

*ven nilavu* - white moon

*venṇereri muracu* - beating of the  
victorious drums

*veriyāṭṭu magaḷir* - orgiastic  
woman dancers

*veṭci* - cattle raiding

*Veda nūl* - Vedic text

*vēḍar* - hunters

*vēlaṇ* - a tribal priest

*vēlaṇ veriyāḍal* - orgiastic dance  
possessed by a spirit

*vēḷaikkīrai* - a kind of spinach/  
Gynandropsis Pentaphylla

*vēmbu* - Neem tree

*vēṅgai* - Kino tree

*vēṭṭai* - hunting

*vēṇīrkālam* - summer season

*vibaccāri* - prostitute

*vidavai* - widow

*vidigaḷ* - rules and regulations

*viṇai* - action

*viṇai eccam* - verbal participle

*viṇaik kōṭpāḍu* - theory of *karma*

*viraliyar* - female dancers

*vīḍuṇṇu* - cessation of birth/  
salvation

*vīram* - chivalry/gallantry

*vīra maraṇam* - heroic death

*vīra maravaṇ* - heroic warrior

## Y

*Yamaṇ* - God of Death

*yāgam* / *yagñā* - Vedic fire

*yāl* - stringed musical instrument

*yōṇi* - vagina

**N. Murugesapandian (1957)**

(Author of the Source Book)

Murugesapandian was born in a business family in Samayanallur village, Madurai district. As a school boy, he had developed an interest in reading books. He obtained B.Sc., degree in Mathematics, M.A. and M.Phil. degrees in Tamil Literature and Ph.D. degree in Library and Information Science. He worked as Librarian in a government aided college and retired from service. He has been active in the field of literary criticism for more than twenty years. He has developed the earnest interest in critically reviewing Tamil literary works, beginning with Sangam literature from the perspectives of modern and post-modern literary theories. He has authored thirty books and over a hundred research papers which are published in Journals and Little Magazines. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the Shanlax International Journal of Tamil Studies since 2016. Besides, he has penned a number of articles on contemporary socio-political issues.



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Govindaswamy Rajagopal is a Professor, teaching Tamil and Comparative Indian Literature in the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi since 1987 and served recently as the Head of the Department for three years (2017-2020). Graduated from the University of Madras, he has obtained M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. Degrees in Tamil from Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati respectively in the years 1981, 1985 and 1989. He has served as the Visiting Professor of Tamil in the Department of Indology, Institute of Oriental Studies, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland for two academic years (2011-2013) and also as the Programme External Examiner for Bachelor of Arts in Tamil Language and Literature programme for Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), Singapore for three academic years (2017-2020).

Professor Rajagopal has authored four books in English titled *Beyond Bhakti: Steps Ahead...* (2007), *Mind and Conduct: Behavioural Psychology in the Sangam Poems* (2015), *Cultural Poetics and Sangam Poetry* (2016), *Etiquette and Ethos: Ethics in Tirukkural and Ācārakkōvai* (2016) and one book in Tamil titled *Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal: Ōr Āyvu* (1985). He has participated in conferences held in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Warsaw (Poland), Prague (Czech Republic), Paris (France) and Chicago (USA). Various reputed Research Institutions and Universities in India and abroad and Tamil Little Magazines have published his research papers.

Sangam classical literature is the basis for the restoration of Tamil mythification and identity. In a nutshell, classical Tamil literature forms the basis for the restoration of Tamil antiquity and identity. The essays in this book are the resultant of a re-reading of the classical Tamil works, through the critical approach imparted by post-modernism. The alternate critical approach of this book rendered to the interpretations that have so far been traditionally uttered by scholars may be irritants to some people. There is a possibility that these articles could provide some insight into classical Tamil literature for those who have some extent of literary interest. These research articles in this book may remove the tight-fitting glazes that have been built in the view point of the traditional way and to find out a way to approach the Sangam classics from a new perspective.

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